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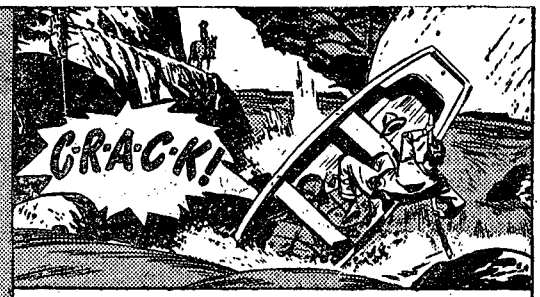
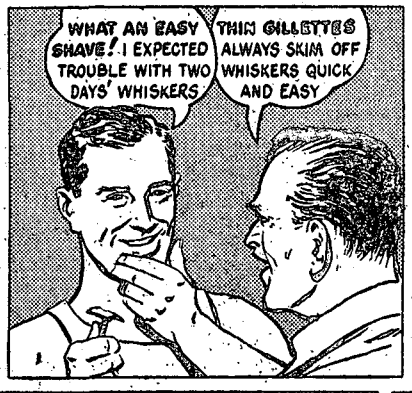
LUCK WAS WITH TOM WHEN . . .



ON VACATION, TOM MAHONEY IS SHOOTING THE LAST AND MOST DANGEROUS RAPIDS IN HIS LONG TRIP THROUGH MAD CANYON WHEN . . .



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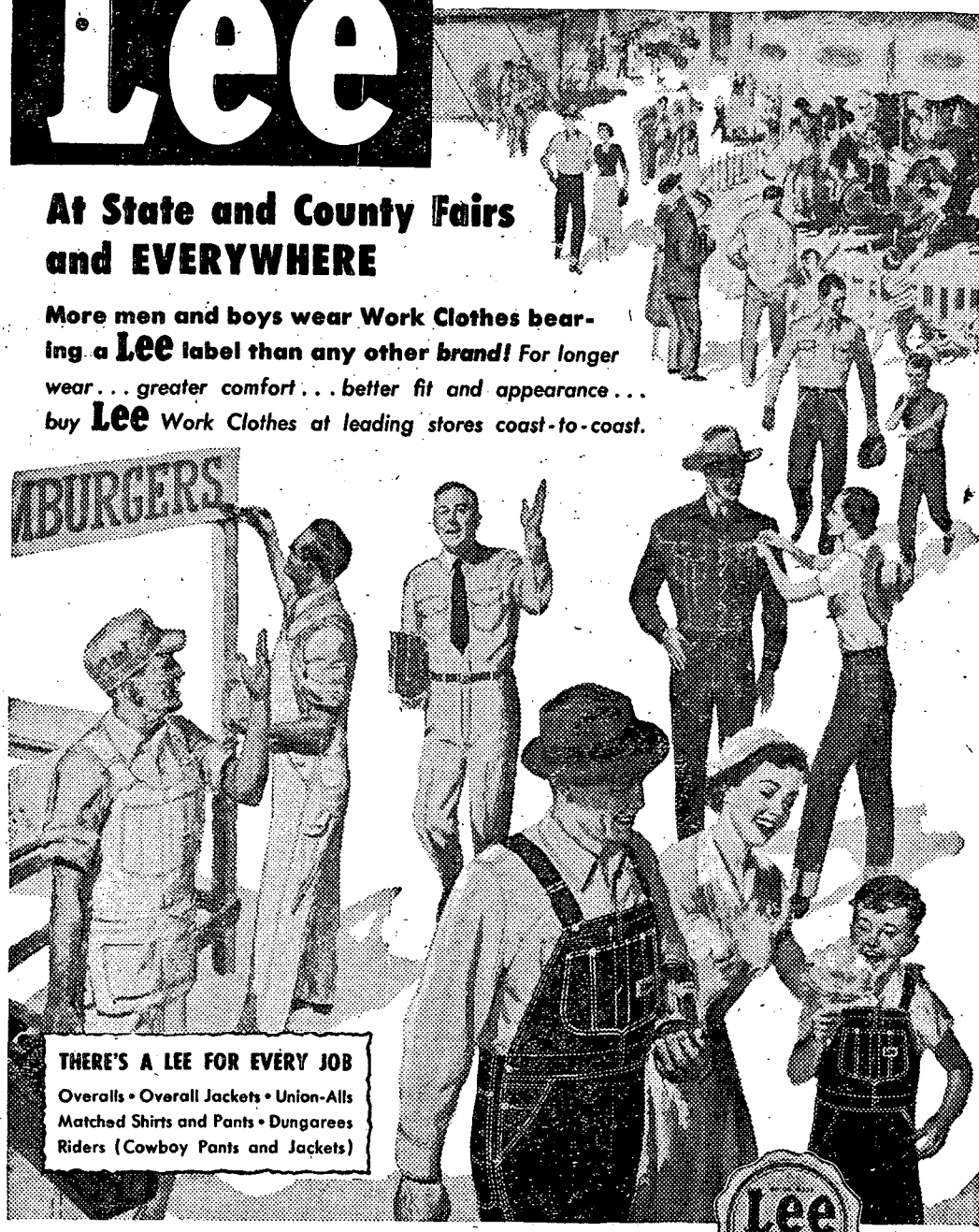

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Vol 12 OCTOBER, 1950 No. 1.

Book-Length Novel

The Woman Who Couldn't Die — **Arthur Stringer** — **12**

Embalmed in a strange sarcophagus of ice, he found her, the Viking woman of his dead past. . . . Had Fate called him only to mourn at her tomb—or had it kept her, a priceless, lovely jewel, frozen in perfection until he should be born again?

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Stories

The Weigher of Souls — **André Maurois** — **86**

Alone, he had dared to imprison the vital essence which is the soul—and alone must face the weird unbearable penalty of his deed.

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Nor Moon by Night — **Peter Cartur** — **116**

Pride was his sin on Earth . . . would it deprive him of his one last chance at Paradise?

The Readers' Viewpoint — **6**

In Planders' Wood — **M. Ludington Cain** — **84**

In the Next Issue — **115**

Cover by De Soto. Inside illustrations by Finlay, Lawrence and Fawcette.

Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, All-Fiction Field, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, New York.

THE EDITOR'S GREETING

We have been fortunate in securing "The Brood of the Witch-Queen" by Sax Rohmer for the next issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. Stories like this and the novel in the present issue by Arthur Stringer, were not available to us before, although often requested by the readers.

Mr. Rohmer's name is associated in popular fiction with the famous Fu Manchu stories, but these thrilling Chinese masterpieces are not fantasy strictly in our sense. "The Brood of the Witch-Queen" is one of the most popular and most requested of his weird yarns.

At the same time we have had another piece of good fortune in being able to add Steele Savage to our staff of top illustrators. This distinguished artist has recently done some illustrations for "The Iliad", "Gods and Heroes", and is well-known as illustrator of many important limited editions of the classics.

And now to our readers' letter, as usual full of discriminating and candid comments. . . .

Sincerely,
Mary Gnaedinger.

Truly High Praise

Dear Mary Gnaedinger:

A few lines of congratulation and appreciation of the wonderful job you are doing in editing the fantasy magazines and bringing to us the stories which many of us (the general public) could not get otherwise except at exorbitant prices in anthologies or bound novels.

I have been a reader of fantasy and horror fiction since 1911 when I began reading the good old yellow-covered *Argosy* and the *All-Story* Magazine and then after I got my first job I went to the Flatiron Building in New York and through the kindness and help of Matthew White. Jr., then editor of *Argosy*, got back numbers to 1906 and devoured their contents avidly; also received some copies of the old *Black Cat* Magazine which was a high class mag of the type of *Weird Tales* and I continued to enjoy that kind of stories in those halcyon days.

Then I chanced upon a copy of F.F.M. and it brought back poignant memories of the glorious past and introduced me to the writings of Arthur Machen who along with Lovecraft (the incomparable) Blackwood, La Spina, Wakefield, James, Onions, Abdullah, Rohmer and Wellman are my particular favorites and Quinn and C. L. Moore.

You revived my hope, for I had been impoverishing myself buying books to try to sate my appetite for that type of fiction and I enjoyed "Three Against The Stars," by North, Tod Robbins' stories, and "The Ninth Life" by Jack Mann, also Haggard's "Morning Star," though I'm not partial to most of Haggard's long-drawn-out narratives which like most of Merritt's (here all raise a howl of protest) have a tendency to become plain adventure stories, though I'll grant Merritt's "Snake Mother", "Metal Monster" and "Moon Pool" are splendid, also his shorts.

Often wonder why Oliver Onions' "Master of the House" or "The Painted Face" never appeared in your publications. Would suggest Sax Rohmer's "Brood of the Witch-Queen" and Machen's "The Terror"—both suitable as novel-length stories.

Just finished reading Chambers' "Maker of Moons", a beautiful fantasy which undoubtedly gave Lovecraft his idea of the cosmic mythology which he so ably perpetuated—also enjoy Chambers' shorts which you publish from time to time.

Miss Gnaedinger, what I enjoy most in your publications is the letter department and criticism and suggestions which I find very interesting even in the rare event when I don't enjoy the long story and I look forward to their perusal. I also crave information about various stories, but one mystery to me is Francis Stevens—so many requests for his stories which I also heartily enjoy, but whether he is living or dead or writing under a nom de plume, I can't find out. His first story "Citadel of Fear" sent me into ecstasies of shivers and when you republished it twenty years later I got the same thrill. If he is alive, why have his stories not been published in book form?

I hope you will keep up the good work and get the satisfaction that a job well done gives.

Would like to hear from any Lovecraft enthusiasts or fans who like to discuss weird or fantasy stories.

Bertrand Wilbur.

337 Madison Ave.,
Perth Amboy, N. J.

Editor's Note: Francis Stevens was (or is) a woman by the name of Gertrude Bennett, who, as far as the editorial world is concerned, disappeared many years ago.

(Continued on page 8)

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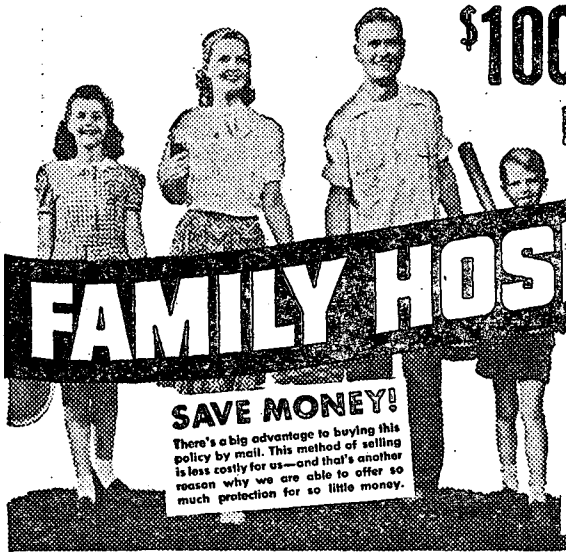

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

(Continued from page 6)

J. E. Scott Dies

It is with the deepest regret that I have to inform you of the death of J. E. Scott, author of "A Bibliography of the Works of Sir Henry Rider Haggard."

I received a letter from his mother on the 23rd of June, informing me of his death which occurred about two weeks before.

I have fourteen letters which I have received from him. It was owing to a letter of mine which appeared in F.F.M. that I received my first letter from him. I felt highly honored to receive a letter from a man whom I practically idolized.

His death is a sad loss to the real clique of Haggard fans, as he had intended to publish a new and greater bibliography, with more material added.

To me there could not be a more fascinating hobby than the collecting of 1st. edition "Haggards" in both English and American editions. It is a real thrill to come home from work, and find in your mail a rare edition that you have been looking years for. I know of only three people who actually possess a copy of "Lady of Blossholme." What happened to the rest of the 15,000 copies which were published in the first edition on December 15, 1909, is beyond me. I know of one collector who had to wait ten years to find a copy. It contains five illustrations in full color by W. Paget. Bound in green cloth, and published by Hodder & Stoughton, of London. One of the illustrations is also pasted on the front cover of the book; similar to the edition of "Red Eve" which is also a hard book to find. In fact, the late J. E. Scott had only seen two copies of "Red Eve" in the last twelve years.

To any serious collector of Haggard, I would recommend his autobiography, "The Days of My Life" published in two volumes, on October 7, 1926, in an edition of 3,000, by Longmans, Green & Co. It is not known how many of this set were published in this country. If anyone knows, I wish that they would inform me. This set contains much information about his stories.

Would suggest in the reprinting of his books that the rarer titles be used, rather than the common titles which can be picked up anywhere for a few dollars. A title, such as "The Way of the Spirit" would be an ideal one, for there do not exist enough books of this title for every reader of F.F.M. to own one. You recall the numerous letters praising "Morning Star." If you were to reprint "Wanderer's Necklace" I predict you would be swamped with eulogies of praise, as this story even tops that one, if it is possible for absolute perfection to be improved upon. There are three different illustrated editions of "King Solomon's Mines," and I can't even find one of them. Glad to see Lovecraft.

Harold F. Keating.

7 Arnold St.,
Quincy 69,
Mass.

(Continued on page 10)

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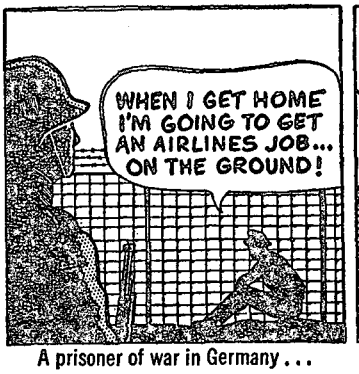
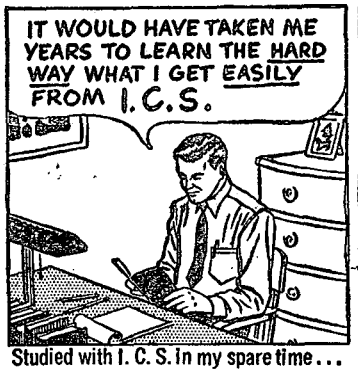
A TRUE I. C. S. STORY *taken from an actual letter*

I was a World War II pilot . . .

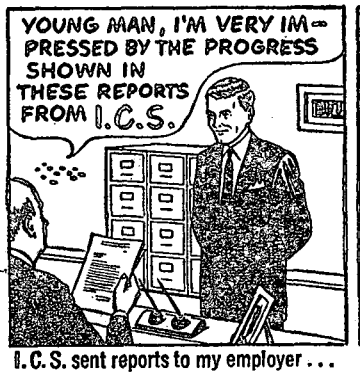


A prisoner of war in Germany . . .

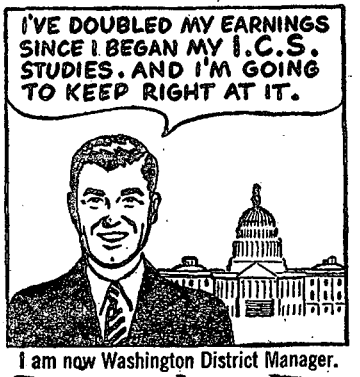
Back home, I was hired by National . . .



Studied with I. C. S. in my spare time . . .



I. C. S. sent reports to my employer . . .



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(Continued from page 8)

For Bok Fans

The June issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* rates just 100%. From the cover, which really illustrates the main story, to the last short, every story was tops. No need to comment on "The Adventures of Wyndham Smith"—a classic by any standard. And you'll make a lot of friends by Lovecraft's classic; many, many readers regard him as the dean of American writers in this field.

So many magazines appear to depend almost entirely on the main story and fill in with hit or miss shorts which are hardly worth reading—another reason why I like F.F.M.; all the stories are good.

Was pleased to see so many favorable comments on Bok, and agree with Morton Paley that he should be given a cover. Am an ardent Bok fan myself and have just sponsored a reproduction of one of his favorite drawings. This is an original, never-before-published 9 x 13 fantastic picture very suitable for framing. Being a mercenary-minded moron, and having counted the cost of pictures, mailing tube, postage, etc. I'm asking 10c per copy, but will be generous and include, for free, a copy of a famous book cover, also by Bok.

H. Morrison.

16 Niles St.,
Dover, N. H.

An Epic

Well, to put it simply and plainly—here we have it again, a major controversy. Is "The Adventure of Wyndham Smith" a classic or is it a work of unbearable drudgery? At first glance it would seem the "Wyndham Smith" is nought but a scrambled battle-of-words. Patience pays, however.

As the plot slowly develops a small streak of charged energy goes through the reader. This is rapidly replaced by relief and spreading joy. "Why," say you in dumb amazement, "this is developing into a classic—literally an epic."

And so it is. An epic. Not since Shiel's "Purple Cloud" appeared a year ago has such a novel graced the pages of F.F.M. After a moment's steady thinking, I placed it above "Purple Cloud." This is open to controversy. I may change my mind later.

How about another Wright effort in future times?

The novel brings to light the observation that F.F.M. and F.N. are presenting, in later issues, much more science fiction in comparison with fantasy. I am not complaining.

I suspect that the August issue is primarily a publicity issue. Most of us fans have at some time or another read "The Time Machine." Those of you that haven't are either new fans or just ain't. But it should draw a large group of non-fantasy fans into the fold.

"Donovan's Brain" by Siodmak is equally as famous. It's been presented on the radio a number of times. It's that famous, although I have never read it before.

Both short stories in June were excellent, being established classics, though I regret the fact that I had read them elsewhere. Still, they were well worth reprinting.

All in all, the best issue in recent years. I should think that in printing such adult themes as "The Adventure of Wyndham Smith" the public at large will be attracted. It's such classics of literature as this that win popular recognition of fantasy. In connection with this, wouldn't it be wise to continue such a policy? There may be a few fan protests but I should venture to say, in the main, F.F.M. will, as a result, improve both in content and circulation.

I am still pounding steadily for a permanent poetry section. Now that you reprint from magazines, there must be an overabundant supply of poems lying around in dusty files. How about some by Robert E. Howard?

Here is a belated toast to F.F.M. for publishing such enjoyable, stimulating, and controversial classics as "The Purple Cloud" and "The Adventure of Wyndham Smith." May your policy and circulation increase steadily with each issue. I feel sure, with most other loyal fans, that it will.

Larry Saunders.

170 Washington Ave.,
Stamford, Conn.

Of Interest to Fans

Just a short notice to tell you how great it was to finally be able to secure for reading the June ish of F.F.M. whose contents included the rare and hard-to-get "The Adventure of Wyndham Smith" by Sydney Fowler Wright. I once attempted to buy a copy several years ago but when the dealer wished $8.00 for it, it was obvious why I readily changed my mind; and it's also pretty obvious by now that your zines are the most unique in the field when we are being constantly supplied not only by some of the tops in reading quality but also when one considers the tidy little sum of money one would pay for most of them in their book form.

The Lawrence illos in the June ish were superb and it is evident that "Larry" has taken it upon himself to adopt some form of a new style in his drawings. I must admit that the improvement is not only outstanding but carries him even further as the only competitor that "the" greatest-of-them-all, Virgil Finlay, has in the field. However, more illustrations per issue would be welcome.

I must, at this point, express appreciation for having my letter printed in the June issue, regarding the American Science-Fantasy Society, since the response was not only wonderful but has helped us immensely in serving the purposes of establishing a worthwhile organization for STFandom, perhaps, for the first time. We are not only interested in establishing A.S.F.S. Chapters in every major city and community in the nation, but we also wish to emphasize that we want to continue being of aid and service to every fan that wishes to join us. We have already established growing A.S.F.S.

(Continued on page 120)

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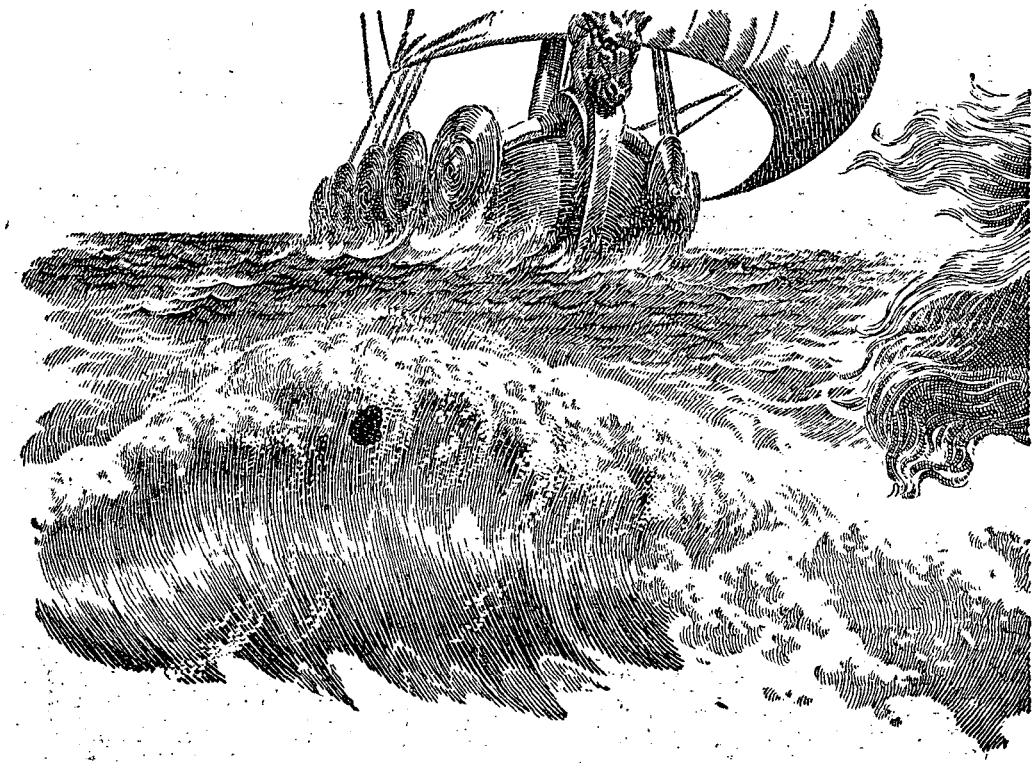

THE WOMAN WHO COULDN'T DIE

By Arthur Stringer

Embalmed in a strange sarcophagus of ice, he found her, the Viking woman of his dead past. Centuries agone had she leaped to the battle cry, his fighting mate by his side. . . . Had Fate called him only to mourn at her tomb—or had it kept her, a priceless, lovely jewel, frozen in perfection until he should be born again?

THE fiord air was windless and humid. So heavy was it, in fact, that the sweat stood out on the bronzed bodies of the rowers as, at a sign from Sigurd Blödoxe, they sat with suspended oars. They sat motionless, making a picture that drifted swan-like in the mirroring quiet of the pearl-misted afternoon.

"Yonder comes Gunhild," announced the tawny-haired Sigurd.

Graafeld, who stood beside him on the gilded skuta-poop, grunted aloud as he detected the bobbing blond head of a swimmer slowly bearing down on them. This swimmer, whose strokes grew more labored as he came closer, was plainly

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Thera began to fight. . . .

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exhausted by the tides which he had been opposing.

"Give him a hand aboard there," commanded the captain of the high-prowed craft. And a dozen hairy arms reached over the low freeboard to help the tired adventurer back to his ship.

Gunhild, lying on the sun-bleached deck-boards, let the warmth of life once more soak into his bones. Blödoxe, with a half-smile about his untroubled blue eye, watched the heaving chest until its movements became less spasmodic.

"What found you in the gut?" he asked. His head-nod toward the inner fiord-end was a curt one.

"Women." replied Gunhild, turning on the wet boards. "Nothing but women."

"Doing what?" demanded Blödoxe, his mailed shoulders stiffening into a sterner line.

"Bathing." retorted the other. "Bathing along the sands of the inner cove, a full dozen of them, like seal-pups along a Logoden rock-ledge!"

"And Thera?"

Gunhild, sitting up, slowly buckled on the bronze-studded sword-belt of ox-hide that had been silently tossed to his side, and then through the belt thrust the leaf-shaped sword of tempered bronze.

"Thera is there," he explained as he continued to dress. "She is there with a fathom or two of yellow hair down about her white shoulders, sunning herself on the cove-sand."

A harder light came into the blue-green eye of the Viking chief from the Baltic mouth. Hunger, like a shadow, passed over the bronzed square face under the winged helmet crested with its raven of gold.

"This, then," he proclaimed as he glanced along the freeboard ringed with its barrier shields of bronze and leather, "is the day that I capture her."

A frown crept over the face of Graafeld, the oldest and dourest of the trio on the afterdeck.

"Thera is to be given as wife to Haakon, the son of Hlaford," he reminded his younger chief. "And there would be scant room on these seas for anyone who angered a woman loved as Thera is loved."

Blödoxe's laugh was deep and indifferent.

"Then, by the hammor of Thor, we shall seek us out other seas where we may find peace with the lady!"

"That means you must travel far," protested the heavy-jowled Graafeld.

"And why must I travel far?"

"Because Olaf of Hordoland is both hot of blood and proud of heart. And a jarl of that breed will not see a daughter angered without embarking after the taker. And Haakon, equally dishonored, would harry and hunt you until the end of time."

Still again Blödoxe laughed his deep-chested laughter. And there was pride in his glance as his eye wandered over the stout-timbered galley with the salt-crusted dragon of gold at its prow.

"They travel fast who overtake Blödoxe," he proclaimed. "And having overtaken him, they are lucky indeed when they live to tell just how they caught the sea lion by its tail."

But the laughter, the next moment, went out of his eyes.

"I want this woman for my wife," he said as he tightened the heavy-buckled belt about his waist. "Twice, now, my eyes have rested on her, and I understand well enough why her beauty is a byword up and down this coast of herring-slitting wenches with little more charm than a she-cod on a smoking-rack. She may be the daughter of the Jarl of Hordoland and she may be duly promised to the lily-skinned Haakon. But that does not figure in the stars as I read them. If I have the wit to seize her, and the power to hold her, she by the rights of our breed belongs to me."

"She herself being willing," amended the frowning Gunhild.

That, for a moment, seemed to hold the other.

"Reason may come in at the door," he finally retorted, "when freedom has flown out of the window. And that is not the first of my troubles. Our duty at the moment is to pluck the fruit while the branch swings low. So we shall divide into two groups, one to clamber quietly up over the cliffs and steal down on the cove from the rear, the other to take the *Dragon* as silently up into the gut, so that we may close in on this white-skinned band of Thera's from two sides. And all must be seemly. In this attack, bear in mind, there must be no wounding or killing. There must be no violence."

"And you yourself?" questioned Graafeld with his sober enough half-smile.

"I will carry off Thera," announced Blödoxe. "But in taking her, she will be accorded the honor of a queen and the daughter of a queen."

It was Gunhild who muttered aloud as

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he clambered down the worn footway between the rowers' benches.

"He abducts his towering queen of beauty," that swart sea-rover rumbled in his chest, "but he abducts her, mark you, with all the gentleness of a sucking lamb!"

II

IT WAS the wolfhound stretched at Thera's feet that lifted an ear, stirred and then growled deep in his throat. Thera, however, gave neither thought nor speech to that movement. Her sea-blue eyes, as she sat indolently combing her hair of gold with a comb of gold more pallid than the tresses through which it so slowly passed, were abstracted and unfocused. Yet there was queenliness in her lassitude and an aura of dignity even in her languor.

"Down, Fleotan!" she called as the hound rose to his feet, his back a-bristle.

She was about to repeat that command when the unformed words died on her lips. For through the mother-of-pearl mist along the gut-water she detected, or thought she detected, a movement that was both uncertain and ambiguous. Her languidly roving eye seemed to make out a gilded skuta-prow creeping shadowlike about the shadowy promontory at the cave mouth. She could not be sure, for a moment, whether the wide-breasted dragon of gold was indeed an actual sea-boat drifting into those sheltered waters, or merely a mirage, a foolish image born of her own foolish brain.

But that question was all too promptly answered for her. It was not, in truth, the idle mirage of an idle afternoon. For at the same instant that Fleotan's bay echoed deep-noted between the fiord-walls, a chorus of higher-pitched screams burst from the young tire-women bathing and wading along the sandy beach. There was a sudden flurry of the whole group from the shallows.

"Sea-robbers!" cried the youngest of that flying band as they ran, huddling low, for the shelter of the cliff-rocks. Yet they recoiled again, even as sharply as they advanced. For down on them from the crags above came circling and sliding a dozen swart men, men unknown to them, evil-eyed men from another country and another coast. And as the women ran screaming back into the sea-water the gilded skuta grounded on the cove-sand, within a boat-length of where Thera's handmaidens stood with something more than horror in their eyes. And from a garth, high overhead, geese trumpeted.

Thera herself did not join in that commotion. She was not a daughter of swineherds. Her only movement, in fact, was to rise frowningly to her feet and throw a tunic of woven Finnish wool about her white shoulders. It was a heavy tunic, colored like a rowan-leaf first touched with frost, regally lined with swan's-down and bordered with miniver. And about it fell her hair of living and liquid gold, gold luminous as a cat's eye by night, gold indiscernibly vivid yet soft, with a muffled radiance all its own, like that of a rose-leaf behind which a candle burns.

And thus cloaked, a new dignity came to her queenly figure. But her face remained clouded as the bronzed and thick-shouldered Blödoxe leaped waist-deep into the cove-water and with the arrogance of the fearless began to wade ashore. Under her breath, indeed, she must have spoken some word to the wolfhound. For Fleotan, as the Viking came toward her, sprang straight for the throat of the intruder.

Blödoxe, in the face of that assault, merely laughed aloud. For the bronzed and hairy hands that could be so quick in movement met in some way about the longer-haired neck of the animal. There was a moment's struggle as the great fingers clamped closer about the writhing throat and as the snarling head was thrust and held under the sea-water. Then, tossing the quieted body disdainfully aside, Blödoxe strode up the beach-sand to where Thera stood with one hand pressed flat against her white shoulder-flesh.

Whatever her secret impulses, she still remained motionless. A berserk-gang was a berserk-gang, but she was no swineherd's daughter. She knew what that advance, what that attack, meant. She knew also the sun-darkened square face with the tawny hair under the battered rim of the helmet. Jarl Olaf, her father, had only a year before denied that lawless scourge of the northern seas both the banquet-hall of his home and the hand of his daughter, who was not for pirates and coast-plunderers steeped in blood. And now—

But Sigurd Blödoxe gave her scant time for thought, just as he wasted no moment on speech. He merely stooped low and caught her about the knees, the knees that showed ivory white through the miniver-bordered tunic. He merely caught her up, swinging her from her feet and fling-

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ing her over his broad shoulder, even as he turned in his tracks and started back toward the galley.

And that, plainly, held little of the respect due to one of royal blood. For it was then that Thera began to fight. It was then, raging against the ignominy of her oat-sack position, that she began to twist and writhe and struggle in the great-thewed arms of her captor. Where she saw flesh, she clawed at it with her nails. Where she could find a loose tress of tawny hair, she clutched at it and did her utmost to tear it from the helmeted skull. Where she could sink her teeth into an unarmored forearm, she bit at the corded muscles, bit with the ferocity of a wild animal, forgetting at last that she was the daughter of a jarl.

Blödoxe, hip-deep in the cove-water, stopped short at that and swung her about, shaking her as a terrier shakes a rat. Yet he viewed her indifferently, with a grimness born of many harryings.

"Kill me," gasped Thera, her scorn of him overcoming even her fear. "Kill me as you killed my dog!"

"That I will not," retorted Blödoxe, still studying her face. "We kill only whom we hate."

"Your hate is all I ask," cried Thera, storming again against his strength. Froth even came from her mouth, as from the bitted mouth of a horse, hard-driven.

"That you will never get," contended her captor. And quietly yet firmly he held her, as she still again struggled to free herself from his clasp. She was both taller of body and more flowerlike of face, he decided, than he had pictured her in his memory.

"Haakon will kill you for this," she panted. "And all Hordoland will keep at your heels, will keep after you until the six seas can no longer hide you."

"Even so," averred the grim-eyed Blödoxe, "you are mine, and you are coming with me."

And with that he caught her closer and resumed his approach to the galley-side.

"I will kill myself," murmured the woman in his arms, speaking so quietly that the half-smile went again from his lips.

"You are much too fair for an end so foul," he said with a heavy effort at mockery. His face clouded, however, when a moment later he saw her so passive in his arms. She lay there, unresisting and relaxed, with her eyes closed and a wistful puckering of the deep-cut lips that made him think of the mouth of a child.

Yet his face was once more hard and his manner was pirate-rough as he flung her bodily over the weathered gunwale and clambered up after her. For already, from the cliffs high overhead, came the alarm of many horns and the echo of angry shouts. The plunderer of untold coasts merely stopped long enough to wrap the woman in her fallen wet tunic, lift her to the fore-cabin under the carved prow, and put his own ship's horn to his lips to recall his scattered men.

"They will be after us," said Graafeld with a curt glance along the cliff-tops, "before another dog can be drowned."

"Then head for the open sea," commanded Blödoxe as he signaled for Gunhild to take the heavy tiller.

"And once there?" questioned the phlegmatic Graafeld as the rowers came clambering aboard.

"Then we will lay her head due west," said Blödoxe, "and if need be, go on to Jöklarland. And beyond that, the Danes tell me, there be other lands, lands of green ice and many islands and strange people who live at peace with their neighbors."

"And?" prompted Graafeld.

"It may so fall out that we shall go to that farther land," said the quiet-lipped Blödoxe.

"In flight?" asked the saturnine Gunhild.

"Jarl Olaf has many ships," observed Blödoxe. "And men have gone far in the search of a lost woman."

III

THE eyes of Thera, once the fairest woman of all Hordoland, remained clouded and inscrutable as the fleeing *Dragon* traversed her lonely northern seas. Seldom did the captive of Sigurd Blödoxe speak, as she sat high and lonely in the galley's castle, and never once was she seen to weep. Hour by silent hour she watched the men at the oars; she watched the bellying square-sail; she watched the plunging green seas on which the tarnished gilded prow rose and fell and rose and fell until all life seemed merely a dream of endless rocking on an endless watery trail that led always toward a slowly setting sun.

Even when they saw land, at last, misted glens and coves and precipitous walls of basalt surmounted by straggling snowfields, to the north of their course, the

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queenly woman with the brooding blue eyes betrayed little interest in that distant country to which they were taking her.

But she had her own thoughts on the matter, plainly enough, for, having studied the wake that lay behind their rudder, the wake that lay between her and her lost Hordoland, and having gazed at the desolate and rocky table-land that loomed ever higher on their quarter, she stood for many moments with her eyes closed and her hand pressed on her heart. Then, gathering her tunic about her, she crossed slowly to the rail of the ship, looked up at the sky arching so pallidly above her and flung herself headlong into the sea.

Blödoxe, braced at the tiller, saw that unexpected movement and felt his blood run cold. But he lost little enough time in hesitation. Flinging off helmet and sword-belt, he plunged in after her. He dove from the dipping poop-rail and for a moment was lost in a mountain of green. Over tumbling wave by wave he fought his way to the white body enmeshed in its floating gold. He came up with her, stroke by powerful stroke. He caught her and held her head above water, lifting, as he did so, the strangling wet hair from her face. Then, swimming more easily, he supported her there in the tumbling green seas until the dusky-lidded blue eyes opened again.

"Let me die," she said with a moan of weariness. "Please let me die!"

"Not while I live," proclaimed the man at her side.

"Oh, be merciful and let me die," she repeated, making an effort as though to push his great sinewed body away from her.

"Have I wronged you that deeply?" he asked, a note of wonder in his voice. For, as never before, he was conscious of something pitiful in the pallid face so close to his own.

"You have wronged me beyond forgiveness," she told him, turning away as the galley, doubling about, came bearing down on them.

"Then it is I who should die," said Blödoxe, with wonder on that face scarred by many blades. And at those unlooked-for words she let her gaze lock with his. So, as they floated there in the heaving waters, side by side, they looked each into the eyes of the other. And if, from that strange and silent study, they gleaned anything of moment, they kept that discovery to themselves. For they were oddly quiet as they were lifted aboard the galley. And Thera, when her tall body was once more dry and warm, sat apart, deep in thought.

Those watching her, in fact, observed for the first time that she was weeping, weeping openly and abandonedly. And when Blödoxe, sorely troubled in heart, finally went to comfort a woman thus desolated, she surprised him by not turning silently away but by clinging to his shoulders and weeping more abandonedly than ever, by resting in his great arms and pillowing what seemed a hopelessly tired head on his shoulder.

So astonished was Blödoxe, in truth, that when Gunhild called out that three Norse sails were following after them, the master of the galley showed scant concern in that discovery.

"Would you be overhauled by your enemies?" demanded Graafeld, squinting back at the heavy-timbered skutas so doggedly bearing down on them.

But Blödoxe, after one glance at the plunging galleys with the bronze-studded shields along the freeboards, let his eyes rest again on the face of the woman so forlornly clinging to his shoulders..

"That," he told her, "is Haakon and Olaf of Hordoland. And now, of a truth, I would know your will. Shall I take you back to them?"

Thera, for a moment, did not speak.

"They will kill you," she finally said.

"What odds?" cried Blödoxe with his ever careless and deep-chested Viking laugh.

"They would kill you," repeated the woman with the strangely troubled eyes.

"And is that a matter of any great moment?" asked the man with the wind-bronzed face.

Thera did not answer him. By word of mouth, at least, she made no answer to that question. But in her eyes of immemorial blue must have been some semblance of a reply. For Blödoxe, after looking deep into those azure pools, turned about and called to his helmsman.

"Lay her head due west," was that abrupt command. "And every man to the oars."

"Due west?" questioned the somber-faced Graafeld, with a wistful look at the basalt cliffs they were leaving behind them.

"Dut west," repeated Blödoxe. "For we now follow Eric the Red to that new country of his known as Greenland. And we can prove there is still speed in the Dragon.

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"But damned little fight," Graafeld muttered in his throat as, staring over the rail and studying the three Norse skutas, he solemnly licked his lips.

Blödoxe, overhearing that mutter where he stood with an arm about Thera, called back over his shoulders, "Something better than fighting, Old Gray-Coat!"

Graafeld busied himself tightening a strong rope about a salt-encrusted deck-block.

"And after Greenland?" he asked with a shrug of paraded unconcern.

"Still farther west, if need be," said Blödoxe as he lifted a lappet of wolf-skin about Thera's shoulders, to the end that the freshening wind might not chill her.

CHAPTER I

THE FRONTIERS OF ADVENTURE

I AM not a scholar. What I have to tell must be told plainly, and, I fear, without much art. It will be told as simply and honestly as I am able. Omissions there may be, and at times I shall speak of things which I can not fully understand, for the adventures whereof I write were of themselves mysterious.

Since I went through those adventures twenty-seven long years have slipped away, and memory, I find, has the trick of more and more playing me false. But I will say what I have to say as clearly as I can, knowing that the matters I speak of are not always easy of belief, yet heartened by the remembrance that I myself have witnessed them, and coming through them with a whole skin and a sound mind, am now able to tell them to others.

And the unkenneling of these curious doings, I pray God, will not only discharge an ancient debt to the honorable dead but will also serve to bring peace to an old heart and rest to an old head.

The beginning of these events dates back to the closing years of the last century, though I must explain that I, David Law, was a Glasgow-born lad sent early to Canada, where for three lonely years I was bookkeeper and under clerk in the trading post of Andrew McCosh, some forty-odd miles north of Fort Metangami. McCosh, the dourest of dour Scotch-Canadians, was one of the last of the Free Traders along the receding fringe of the wilderness that moves for ever toward the Pole, a man of massive frame and massive appetites, who from the first held me and my bookish disposition in small esteem. But my body toughened and my narrow shoulders widened under the rough usage of frontier existence, where I learned things even more varied than the sorting of furs that smelled not unlike the state of Denmark in the régime of Claudius and even more exciting than mushing through the wintry backwoods with a team of huskies, any one of which would take a bite out of your brisket at the first possible chance.

But under Sandy McCosh I encountered neither peace of mind nor comfort of body, though it was not until the end of my third winter of overwork that I found the courage to tell the whiskered tyrant of that frozen little kingdom of solitude what I thought of him, and of his drunkenness.

For a year, after that, I taught in a mission-school, and beyond an ample supply of books to read got little for my efforts excepting my board and keep. Then, having done a good turn for a Mr. Curran, who injured his leg while moose-hunting in my district, I was eventually taken down to Montreal by that gentleman and given a position in his law-office. I became restive there, however, and before the year was out joined the staff of the *Herald* as a reporter.

My work with the *Herald,* I fear, made much greater demand on my legs than on my brain, for it was my duty to cover the police-court, the water-front and shipping, the railways and hotels, the markets and hospitals and music-halls, and incidentally to catch on the wing any story worthy of print. Quite a number of these I picked up from argonauts bound for the Klondike, since, following the Bonanza Creek Strike of 'ninety-six, there had been a steady drift of eastern adventurers toward the Yukon.

One of my few friends in that oddly Old-World city on the St. Lawrence was a drunkard and a derelict scholar named Donald Cristie, who in his periods of sobriety was a proof-reader on the *Herald,* where his lapses of character were condoned because of a scholarship that was unique in newspaper circles and a knowledge that seemed equaled only in the encyclopedias. He was a son of Auld Reekie and claimed to be an honor graduate of the University of Edinburgh. But he had been a drifter, apparently, for the greater part of a long and eventful life, and among his other adventures had sojourned for three monastic years within the walls of

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Francis Xavier College, where he assisted in the compilation and translation of the *Jesuit Relations*.

He was rather an old man when I first knew him, old enough, indeed, to claim that he had split more than one bottle with Louis Stevenson in his time. And color was laid to this claim by a personal letter from the author of "Treasure Island" which he on one occasion placed before my rapt and eager eyes, for in those days I was much under the spell of my gifted fellow-countryman who had so recently and so romantically passed away in Samoa.

But as the rubicund and bloated figure of Donald Cristie appears only briefly and indirectly in this narrative, I must merely pause to add that the one fantastic ambition of this scholastic derelict was to embark on an exploring trip into the Far North. As, however, he walked with difficulty because of a stroke he had sustained a couple of years before I first knew him, and as he was chronically without funds, I accepted his talk about Arctic expeditions as merely the romancing of a mind already on the eve of dissolution.

That dissolution, however, was much closer than I had anticipated, for a second stroke, following the consumption of more Scotch whisky than I would care to disclose, put Cristie on his back and kept him there for the few remaining weeks of his life. He was then unable to talk, but after repeated and pitiful efforts on his part to communicate with me, I realized that he was trying to give me a message in regard to a packet of papers which he took from under his pillow.

I thought at first it was a will, and, being young, I promptly sniffed the aroma of romance in the situation. On looking over the parchment pages, however, I found them yellowish with age and inscribed in a cramped hand and a language that was unknown to me. Yet on the night of his death he signified by pantomime that he wished me to keep these papers, together with a Moss-Giel edition of Burns which I valued much more highly.

IT WAS not until two or three weeks after his burial, made possible by a collection taken up among the small circle sufficiently interested to keep his interment from being an ignominious one, that I gave any sustained attention to the dog-eared document thus bequeathed to me. Then, taking it to Anatole Paradis, a friendly old book-dealer in St. Antoine Street, I found it to be written in eighteenth-century French and to deal in part with the career of a certain Father Valiquette, a Jesuit missionary-priest.

The ex-missionary, it seems, had set out in search of a lost tribe which Indian superstition credited as existing in the land of the midnight sun, and after three years of silence sent out word, by means of a group of Tokakagin gold-diggers who had drifted eastward in a Danish schooner, that he had not only found the lost tribe in question but that he was about to be put to death for entering a tribal sanctuary known as the Temple of the Timeless Virgin. Before meeting with the disfavor which resulted in his death, however, he found this strange tribe credulous enough to accept him as a sort of Messiah, and even with the shadow of death over him proclaimed to his persecutors that a second and greater white prophet would come to them across the unknown mountains and redeem them from their ignorance. Nor was Valiquette so interested in the other world that he overlooked explaining certain physical attributes of his northern Eden, which he described as startlingly tempered in climate, for such a latitude, and as so rich in gold that hunting weapons and household tools were made of the precious metal, as were even the steps and emblems of the tribal temples.

On the last page of the worn script was a roughly drawn map, of which neither the erudite old book dealer nor I myself could make much, study it as we might. And, inviting as the document seemed to me, at my first glimpse through the cramped and age-yellowed script, the time soon came when I gave it little actual thought. For in those days, with the Klondike rush still on, there was talk enough all about me of gold and gold-seeking, and week by week I encountered sufficiently fantastic plans for mastering the overland route to the Yukon and sufficiently fantastic dreams of a new El Dorado in the still little-known North.

Day by day I saw these argonauts stream into the city on the St. Lawrence and strike westward across the continent. And it was my duty, not to emulate them, but to write plausibly interesting paragraphs about them for an ever-hungry paper which gave me very little time for day-dreaming.

Too many waves of sensation, I'm afraid, played over me to permit my harried mind to dwell long on poor Cristie or his penny-a-liner's phantasy of polar treasure and

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unauthenticated Arctic wanderers. From time immemorial, I knew, documents such as his had been fabricated by the unscrupulous and palmed off on the unsuspecting. And while, now and then, I would turn over the faded pages with a feeble revival of interest, they became more the memento of a lost companion than the inspiration of a future enterprise. And I had my daily bread to earn.

In the pursuit of that laudable ambition, not long afterward, I came into contact with another of earth's restless wanderers, with one of the oddest characters, in fact, it had ever been my good or bad fortune to encounter. The person I speak of was a swarthy-skinned Corsican called Ramolino, who later, for reasons best known to himself, changed his name to Pareso and thereafter insisted on being addressed by the latter patronymic.

How great a liar Pareso may have been I then had no means of determining, but once, when under the influence of French brandy, he confided to me that he sprang from the same Ramolino family into which Carlo Bonaparte, the father of the great Napoleon, had married. There was that in his appearance, I must acknowledge, which gave a coloring of credibility to his claim, for more times than once the odd swarthiness of the man's skin, the thickness of his squat shoulders, the flash of fire from the imperial dark eye, the eagle-like profile of the face and the determinedly massive jaw, faintly reminded me of portraits that I had seen of the First Emperor. And in the man's mental make-up, I was later to find, there was a distorted though persistent touch of the Napoleonic.

Carlo Pareso, as I must hereafter denominate him, first came to my attention as a man of science. What brought him to Montreal I never knew, but he claimed to be on his way from Vienna to the Orient, whither he was bound, eventually, to make a study of beri-beri in Japan. He became an object of press curiosity, however, when he proclaimed the possibility of obviating the annual ice-jam in the river by the use of a heat-producing chemical which he termed *Thermidian.**

Though he somewhat discounted my earlier impression of him as a sober-minded man of science by later outlining a plan for the damming of the Straits of Belle Isle and thereby not only shutting the southerly-drifting icebergs from our busy sea-lanes but altering the entire climate of eastern Canada. He told me himself, during our first interview, that he had recently been experimenting, at Messina, with cold-light and luminescence in sea-fish and that he proposed in my country to carry on his research regarding the hibernation of certain terrestrial *mollusca* peculiar to northern latitudes. I might have been more impressed by this, had I not also learned that he had once been associated with an Egyptian professional cataleptic named Satahra Bey, an uncanny gentlemen who had the habit of going into trances and permitting himself to be coffined and buried in sand for three days at a time.

MY INTEREST in Doctor Pareso suffered a natural decline, in fact, until he was once more thrust under my reportorial eye when I learned that the officials of the Royal Victoria Hospital had rather peremptorily refused to permit him the use of their surgery in experimenting with a simplified instrument for blood-transfusion.

This instrument, which he later showed me, stood so small that it could be easily carried in the pocket. It was made up of the blood-controller, a small syringe, a stand for holding the syringe and controller, and the rubber tubing and needles.

A surgeon, he explained to me, could by himself and quite without help do the most satisfactory transfusion, all that was necessary being to insert one needle in the vein of the donor and the other in the vein of the recipient, and then push back and forth the plunger of the syringe. By means of two valves, acting solely under the force of gravity, the passage of whole blood from donor to recipient was automatically controlled and the danger of air-embolism and coagulation practically removed.

It all sounded convincing enough and I promptly scented drama in the discovery that the hospital authorities were resolutely set against cooperating with a man of genius, although a foreigner, who was fighting for the alleviation of human suffering. When, however, I applied at the hospital for some ponderable reason for this refusal I was dismissed with the somewhat pompous explanation that Doctor Pareso's papers were not in order and that his European references had not proved altogether satisfactory. This struck me, all things considered, as a somewhat

*This, I assume, must have borne some resemblance to the *Thermite* of later discovery.—David Law.

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bigoted reversion to red-tapism, and with the fervor of youth I determined to wage journalistic warfare on the enemies of a man who impressed me as a genius and an agent of mercy.

But my editor, I soon found, had experienced a sudden change of faith in this particular case, and I was more or less pointedly told that the columns of the *Herald* were no longer open to medical controversy. There were many rumors, it is true, the most conspicuous being that Pareso was an involuntarily exile from Europe because of the death of a fellow-worker in one of his surgical experiments. Still another claimed he was a charlatan hypnotist who had been escorted over the border by the American authorities. Be that as it may, I began to find this mysterious stranger a most interesting man, a most persuasive talker, and the master of enough medical knowledge to astound my layman's mind.

I need not here go into his many experiments in the matter of suspended animation, such as desanguinating the Columbian ground-squirrel during its hibernation-period when its body-temperature had dropped as low as forty degrees Fahrenheit, freezing it stiff, and then successfully reviving it. But he himself showed me a sleeping frog which he had preserved *in vitro* for eleven years and boasted that he could bring it to active life in half an hour's time. And with my own eyes I have seen him freeze fish in solid ice, keep them dormant and apparently dead for weeks, and then release and revive them so that they frisked about a tank as full of life as they were before their wintry sleep.

He was also interested, I had reason to know, in cytology and cell-continuity, but I was too little versed in biology either to understand the nature of his experiments or to follow his line of thought when he mouthed about "the chromatin of the oocyte" and "longitudinally divided chromosomes."

I can recall his excitement, however, when he came into possession of a handful of what was called "mummy wheat," which was wheat reputed to have been disinterred from an Egyptian tomb at least two thousand years old, and the care and patience with which he tested this shriveled grain for some trace of fertility, though I found it hard to understand, at the time, why his failure to find any ghostly sign of life in the parched kernels which Pharaoh's slaves may have harvested should leave him so depressed in spirit.

But something occurred that midsummer that both drew me closer to this man Pareso and affected all the rest of my life. The event in question was the arrival at the head waters of the St. Lawrence of a weather-beaten yawl from Norway. This odd craft, called the *Lief Erickson,* manned only by three Norse mariners as weather-beaten as their boat, had set sail from the Norwegian port of Droennoey early in the spring, intent on following the old Viking trail to America. It was my duty as a waterfront reporter to harvest the details of this foolhardy venture, and I was duly instructed to make the most of the story.

I had unexpected difficulties, however, in gathering my data, for the *Lief Erickson* was looked on with obvious suspicion by the harbor authorities, and two days elapsed before the little ketch-rigged yawl of only thirteen tons was permitted to pass quarantine and obtain pratique. And when I finally stumbled aboard, on a sultry August night, I found the three hardy Norsemen very tenuously interested in a public exploitation of their adventure.

This odd trio, in fact, were very much in their cups, evidently celebrating their arrival at their journey's end by the absorption of more Jamaica rum than was good for them. I tried as best I could to explain my business, but their limited knowledge of English must have led them to mistake me for one of the port officials who had been causing them so much trouble, for they bore down on me in a body and with berserker shouts of recklessness threw me ashore.

I was disappointed but not discouraged by this treatment. I even went back the next day to find the *Lief Erickson* empty and a battered bronze padlock on the salt-crusted door. When I returned the following night, however, I found my three Norsemen at home. Lodbrog, a sailor, was asleep in his bunk. Wickstram, the skipper, was drinking black coffee and seemed sober enough.

He told me in broken English, once he was convinced of my friendliness, the chief events of their voyage—how the three of them had traveled nearly four thousand miles through northern seas, how they had been battered by waves and blocked by ice, how their water had run low and they had refilled their casks by catching rain in a spare sail. How in good weather they had increased the food sup-

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ply in their lazarette by angling over the side, how they took turns at navigating and keeping watch and had to rig up a sea-anchor, to ride out the Grand Banks gales, and got lost in a fog in the Gulf, and grounded on Anticosti, and were all but run down by a liner. And how, in the end, to my way of thinking, they were almost justified in celebrating their delivery from the deep by this carousal that had left their wits heavy and their tongues swollen.

I was shown the antiquated quadrant they used in making observations, Wickstram assuring me it had been in his family for over three generations and was at least a century old.

WHAT most caught and held my attention, however, was the figure of the third seaman. He answered to the name of Karl Knutsson, and from a hint or two that was dropped, must at one time have been a smuggler along the Scandinavian coast. He was, all told, one of the most extraordinary men I have ever met, a towering Norse giant, a good six feet and three inches in height. I can still see him as he lay sprawled back that night under the swinging oil-lamp in the low-roofed cabin, the light shining on his tawny gold hair and his yellow beard that had glints of copper in it and his huge white-skinned torso where he had thrown open his shirt against the heat of the August night.

The throat and forearms of that body, where the North Atlantic sun and wind had played on them for months at a time, were still a golden red, the red of Quebec sunsets over a black fringe of pine-tops. His eyes, although a little bloodshot from the alcohol that still soured in his huge hulk of a body, were the bluest eyes I had ever seen in a man, richer than Antwerp-blue and less opaque than sapphire, a little lighter than the blue you see in the best of the old Dutch plates and a little darker than the luminous azure you see in a rain-washed northern sky in clearing spring water. His teeth were square and white, and his lips were full and red, so full and red that it gave his face a touch of the sensual.

Yet with all his size and strength there was a suggestion of womanishness about Knutsson. I can't be sure whether it was his passiveness or the soft blue of his eye and the softer gold of his hair or the milk-white skin of the body only half covered by its soiled clothing, but there was something challenging and expository about his beauty. For he was beautiful, in his gigantic Goth way, if you could only forget about his tainted breath and his unclean garments and his half-drunken, guttural, ribald yodeling as he lounged back and showed his disregard for my company by singing some unknown song in his native tongue.

He was beautiful enough to make you think of Scandinavian mythology and wonder if Wodin and Thor must not have looked like this vivid, deep-chested, full-blooded giant with the mane of tawny gold and the immemorial blue eyes that made you like the man in spite of his paraded weakness of character. For, oddly enough, I did find myself drawn toward this man Knutsson. I wanted to know him better, to find out more about him, to determine what lay behind that golden mask of indifference.

On that first night, it is true, he made no articulate response to the questions with which I plied him. He did not even deign to observe me. And when I asked the russet-skinned Wickstram if it was one of the old sagas of his people that Knutsson was singing, the skipper of the *Lief Erickson* merely laughed a raucous laugh.

"That ban a love song," he said in his groping English. "I dank he sing him so because he loves a woman."

"What woman?" I asked, eager to feel my way into the inner folds of romance. But Wickstram merely shrugged.

"Any woman," he said as he held a bottle up to the oil-lamp to see how much liquor remained in it.

Yet I was soon destined to know Knutsson better. I had directed my steps, a few nights later, to the Lower Town, where I was hoping a visit to French Annie's would bring me certain information regarding a Chinese smuggling coup that had met with disaster on the Vermont border. It was very hot that night, and I could sniff the occasional little breaths of cooler air that drifted up from the St. Lawrence, where a liner was noisily coaling bunch-light.

In the narrow little streets of the Lower Town women and children lay out on the curb-stones, gasping for air. A drunkard or two reeled down through the sleeping figures that made one think of a battle-field strewn with its dead. On a corner three women started to squabble with a group of English sailors who looked young enough to be their sons, and a cab rumbled past with four drunken Frenchmen inside,

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and a curb-sleeper awoke and cried in blasphemous *patois* that a cat had bitten her foot. And that was the midnight city of my young manhood as I remember it, the Montreal of the century-end, a tatter of Marseilles and Montmartre, a shred of Bethnal Green, and a touch of Hell.

It was just under the old Jacques Cartier monument that I met Faubert, a coke-peddler who was a tipster for the police and the source of an occasional newspaper story for any leg-man who could buy his way in the graces of that owl-like wanderer.

"You're just in time," he cried as he caught my elbow. "There's been a murder down on the water-front!"

"Who was it?" I asked as I joined him in scurrying down-hill.

"Tite Papineau knifed a big Swede," he said as he hobbled along at my side over the rough pavement. And my heart sank as I saw that he was directing me toward the shadowy slip where the *Lief Erickson* was tied up. For something told me that the victim of that slum-drunkard's knife was my godlike, big, blond Viking, the man named Knutsson. And it impressed me as an ignominious end for a figure of such legendary dimensions, a feeble way of going out for an adventurer so throbbing with life.

At the pier-end I could see a group of three women whispering together. On a moldy string-piece I caught sight of yet another woman, white-faced and young, half wailing and half moaning to herself as she sat there alone.

When I got to the cabin, however, I found only Wickstram inside, Wickstram with a great deal of his color gone as he stared helplessly down at the blood that covered his cabin floor. And lying in the center of this pool was Knutsson, half undressed, with a five-inch knife wound in his milk-white body.

My restless big Wodin, it was explained to me, had wandered up into the Street of Revelers and had there taken a young woman away from her duly acknowledged mate of the moment. And that outraged mate, following the light-hearted couple to the then deserted yawl, had crept aboard and after the manner of his kind avenged that affront to his pride and property.

SICKENED by the sordid tale and dizzy from what I had to kneel in, I stooped over the inert blond head and studied the Viking face that had already merged from its earlier solar vigor to a sort of lunar shadow of itself. It impressed me as a singularly beautiful face, with all its earlier coarsening animality thus removed. But the thing that sent a curdling of nerves eddying through my stooping body was the discovery that the gold-fringed eyelids had opened and that the eyes of immemorial blue were gazing languidly up into my face.

"This man isn't dead!" I cried out with more sharpness than I was at the moment aware of.

"He ban dead!" maintained Wickstram, pointing stubbornly to the blood that covered his cabin floor. There was, in truth, a shocking amount of it. But I could get a trace of a heart-throb under the barrel-like blond chest and I could hear a groan when I turned him over to get some sort of temporary bandage clamped on the gaping wound.

"We've got to have a doctor here," I said as I stood up and dried my hands on a bunk-blanket, "and a police officer!" But the captain of the *Lief Erickson*, apparently, had so suffered at the hands of interfering officials that the thought of his craft being invaded by others did not add to his peace of mind. He swore that he would cut loose and drop down the river, that he would throw the embarrassing blond body overboard, that he would head for the high seas alone, before he would see his ship invaded by the interfering minions of the law.

It was then that I thought of Pareso, of Pareso and his surgical skill, of his cunning, of the little two-cubic-centimeter syringe with its rubber tubing and its hollow needles. And without further loss of time I went careening up to Pareso's quarters and routed him from his bed, explaining everything as well as I could while he dressed and threw together the things that might be needed. And in scarcely less time than it takes to tell about it we were once more in our one-horse fiacre rattling down to the wharf-end, where the women had disappeared and where, for a moment, I half feared the lawless Wickstram had indeed cut his pier-ropes and drifted away in the night.

But he was there, pacing his narrow deck and muttering in a language that I could not understand. Nor could I understand all that Pareso did when he stepped into that fetid cabin with the flooded floor. Yet in thirty seconds his coat was off and his sleeves were rolled up and he was hard at work on his patient, whose

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body he measured with a wondering glance, from time to time, and whose face he stared into, with an unnatural glitter deep in his own studiously narrowed eyes.

From the time of that first strange meeting, in fact, I was not unconscious of some mysterious attraction which the huge blond Norseman had for the swarthy-skinned Corsican. I was amazed at the patience and tenderness with which Pareso nursed and wounded Knutsson, just as I was compelled to marvel at the skill with which he restored the flaccid body to health. Pareso, when his patient could be safely moved, even had the lethargic young Norseman carried up to his own quarters, where he watched him and fed him as carefully as a farmer feeds a prize bullock for a county fair.

It was not odd, accordingly, that a friendship should spring up between this oddly assorted couple, though there were times when Pareso's admiration for the other's physical dimensions filled me with a vague distrust. I thought, at first, that it was a common loneliness, a common solitariness of spirit, that had drawn these two men together. Still later I tried to argue that this affinity was based in some way on the appeal of opposites, since the one was so singularly the complement of the other, the huge Norwegian all flesh, muscle and sinew, and the gaunt Corsican all brain, nervous energy and inventiveness. But there was something beyond that, something which I could not at the time quite fathom.

"A magnificent animal, is he not?" Pareso would exclaim as he watched the passive blond giant with the light glimmering on the tawny gold of his hair.

"I suppose so, if you like them stupid," I grudgingly admitted as I noticed that the pink was once more coming back into Knutsson's ridiculously smooth skin.

"Sometimes they are better so," proclaimed Pareso, following his own line of thought. Yet he was as patient as a mother with a child during those days when he was busy tutoring the placid-eyed giant in English. He watched him with a guarded eye, and convoyed him in his wanderings about the city, and exulted on his return of strength. And Knutsson himself was not without gratitude. But it was something more than friendship that existed between them. Pareso seemed to look on his new companion not merely as a man among men but more as an instrument for far-off and obscure ends. And there were even times when the attitude of Knutsson toward his benefactor seemed like that of a well-tamed animal toward his trainer.

CHAPTER II

THE ARROW OF GOLD

WHEN the *Lief Erickson* burned at her pier through the explosion of an oil-stove and Wickstram and Lodbrog started homeward as steerage passengers on an Anchor liner, this same placid-eyed Knutsson showed no intention of going with them and betrayed no chagrin at their departure. He merely told me he had other plans. And more than once, as autumn deepened into winter, I found Pareso and his ward deep in a study of papers and charts which they put quietly away when I happened to intrude on their conferences. But I could not rid myself of the feeling that something was being conjured up, that mysterious enterprises were being considered.

I had my own troubles, at the time, for certain changes on the *Herald* staff were making my work there none too satisfying either to my editor or to myself. And I did not see so much of Pareso and his companion as I might have wished. It was not that they deliberately shut me out from their little circle. They were exceptionally lonely in that city and were, I think, always glad to see me. But to be frank, I met a Scotch girl just out from Dumbarton that autumn and had a bit o' trouble wi' a skirt, as we used to put it in Glasgow.

I don't know whether it was the soft gray of her eyes or the bonnie soft burr of her voice, but, at any rate, I got to thinking about her more than was good for me. I scrabbled through my day's work and neglected many a night assignment that I might take her out of an evening. But she was cool in the face of my ardency, and disapproved of me and my friends as improvident and too given to drink. And five weeks after I first lost my heart to her, she quietly married a Glengarry man with a fat cattle-farm somewhere in western Ontario.

That both bowled me over like a ninepin and left a strange unrest in my heart. I'd had my fill of romance. I took from my desk the few frugal little notes she had sent me and tore them to shreds. I was about to tear up also the old Valiquette script that lay next to them, feeling the latter to be as foolishly apart from

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my workaday world as the former, when an unexpected call from Pareso took me to the door. Knutsson, he explained, had slipped away and lost himself somewhere in the city, and his keeper was anxious for my help in recovering the truant.

We found him eventually, thanks to my friendliness with the police. We found him late that night in an unsavory *estaminet* beyond the Bonsecours Market, bending silver half-dollars between his great fingers. He was much muddled with Holland gin and much given to music as we convoyed him back to his quarters. But until he was safely back in the fold Pareso made me think of a hen on a hot griddle, or a mare who had lost her foal. He not only breathed easier when he had the big blond once more under his wing, but he opened a bottle of *cognac* for me and drank my health as his benefactor.

"Why should you worry about that empty-headed ash-blond?" I demanded, my tongue plainly a little loosened with the brandy I had swallowed.

"Ah, but I have use for him!" he proclaimed with an intensity which I attributed to the liquor beside him.

"Are you going to take him on tour?" I asked, a trifle mockingly, remembering the care with which that blond giant had been fed and groomed and hardened for unseen ends. For day by day the strange pair had been seen legging it over the neighboring hills; and with the coming of winter they took to snowshoes and tramped the blue-shadowed valleys and farmlands, ten hours at a time.

"There may be more in that than you imagine," was Pareso's somewhat enigmatic reply.

"Then I'd like to know about it," I admitted.

And Pareso looked at me with a questioning eye. But, on second thought, he hesitated at the brink of what he seemed about to say.

"It is a little enterprise of my own devising," he finally asserted, by way of escape.

I was as much surprised as Pareso, I think, by my next question.

"Couldn't I figure in it?" I found myself bold enough to inquire. But I was discouraged and unhappy and the restlessness of spring was in my blood.

"In what way are you qualified for an enterprise like mine?" demanded Pareso as he studied my person with that deep-set and oddly luminous eyes of his.

"I can't answer that until I know the nature of your confounded enterprise," I countered, lightly enough, yet none too pleased at the touch of scorn on his face. "Just where are you bound for?"

He sat silent for a minute or two, weighing, apparently, either the expediency of speech or the actual words he hesitated to utter.

"When the trail is open," he finally told me, "I'm going to head for the Klondike, for the Klondike by the overland route from Edmonton."

"For gold?" I asked, in no way startled by a statement far from exceptional in those days of mad migrations.

"For gold—and for more than gold!" was his slightly retarded response.

"What more?" I inquired, watching him as he downed another glass of *cognac*.

"What business is that of yours?" he challenged as he pushed one of his unholy specimens *in vitro* farther over on his desk.

"I thought we were friends," I reminded him, with a head-nod toward the snoring Knutsson. And after another silence the man of science wagged his head slowly up and down.

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"You are right," he said, with a kindlier light in his eye. And I watched him as he turned to a desk-drawer and from its depth drew out a small metal object that glittered bright in the lamplight. I saw, as he held it out to me, that it was an arrow-head. And when I took it up and examined it more closely I saw that this arrow-head was fashioned of solid gold.

"We are going where this came from!"

Yet the words, at the moment, carried no particular message to me. I remembered, for the first time, a story I had once heard from the lips of Andrew McCosh, a vague story about a half-breed in the Barren Grounds bringing down a wild-goose with an arrow-head of gold encysted in the breast-meat with which he later fed his hungry family.

I had also heard of patients in Maztlan hospital, soldiers who had been wounded fighting the Yaqui Indians, having bullets of gold dug out of their battered bodies. But I had never been told of a people so primitive that they shafted and feathered two ounces of precious metal to bring down either a teal-duck or a tribal enemy. I had never heard of such yarns, I inwardly protested, until I suddenly remembered about the Valiquette parchment which I carried at the moment in my pocket. And I'll never forget the small tingle of excitement that went needling up and down my backbone as I sensed even this shadowy confirmation of a story which I had accepted as phantasy.

"Can you read French?" I asked soberly enough. "Old French?"

I could hear Pareso's laugh as I reached into my pocket for those time-yellowed pages.

"I was born a Frenchman," he reminded me. "And in seven languages I am not altogether at sea."

"Then supposing you run your eye over this," I suggested as carelessly as I was able.

He took the parchment, with scant show of interest. He even glanced over his shoulder toward the sleeping Knutsson, before unfolding the pages.

I leaned back in my chair, watching Pareso.

He rubbed his temple, grunted once or twice, shifted in his seat and resumed his reading with what looked like a frown of annoyance on his face. Then, as he read, I saw his eyes grow hard with interest. He leaned closer over the script, looking more hawklike than ever as he deciphered the time-dulled words.

WHEN he had finished he sat for a full five minutes, staring into space, without speaking or moving. Then he abstractedly opened a desk-drawer, took out what seemed to be a blue-paper map of his own, and placed it beside the abraded parchment chart attached to the Valiquette script. I could see his lungs fill with a deep breath as he studied and compared the two apparently inchoate designs.

"This is a gift from God!" he finally said. And he said it in a low and tremulous voice, more to himself than to me.

"On the contrary," I retorted with a wilful sort of quietness, "it came from a drunken ne'er-do-well who was a little off in his upper story!" And I told him, as briefly as I could, about Donald Cristie and his foolish dreams of Arctic crusades.

There was a touch of impatience on Pareso's face as he sat studying me. Instead of deriding my flippancy, however, he once more reached into his desk-drawer and produced a wrist-bracelet of heavy gold, in the rough form of a serpent, and a crescent broad-ax inlaid with silver.

"Do you know anything about such matters?" he demanded as he placed them before me.

I had to acknowledge that I did not.

"That is Scandinavian metal-work of the tenth century," he proclaimed. "That ax was made about the time Ottar of Helgeland first rounded the North Cape and saw the midnight sun, before Eric the Red discovered Greenland and founded a Norse settlement on its shores. And that bracelet was once worn by Thera, the daughter of Olaf Halfdan, nearly four centuries before Columbus discovered America."

"Well," I still perversely maintained, "she must be good and dead by this time."

"I'm not so sure of that!" he said with a sudden and absurd clenching of his lean jaw. "She's waiting for us!"

"Waiting for us?" I echoed, staring at the *cognac* bottle to see how much of it he really had drunk. "I don't quite follow you."

"Of course you don't," derided Pareso. "But there's a point or two I'd like to make plain to you. I myself have hunted gold in Kamchatka and Anadir. I have gathered fossil ivory on the Taimyr coast and lived on dog-flesh for a week in Liakhov. I have gone hungry in strange countries and have lived among people with strange ways. And at Chutoskoi, where I saved a fugitive seal-poacher from death, I came into possession of these pieces of metal and

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certain information as to their origin."

"Your story," I ventured, "must go back pertty far."

Pareso, I knew, was not a man of emotion. But in the lamplight I could see his eyes glow like coals.

"It goes back, sir, a thousand long years," he said with a fist-thump on the table-end. "It goes back to the time of Sigurd Blödoxe, who had been a follower of Eric the Red and the captain of a band of sea-pirates from the Island of Wollin, at the mouth of the Oder. It was this same Blödoxe who abducted Thera, the daughter of a certain Earl Olaf, a Viking chief of Hordoland, the Thera of such soft and queenly beauty that sagas were once written about her."

"Is this," I interrupted, "fairy-tale or fact?"

"It's fact," retorted Pareso. "It's as much history as the discovery of this America of yours. But kindly permit me to proceed with my story. When Jarl Olaf and a younger prince named Haakon, presumably a prospective son-in-law of Olaf, started in pursuit of Blödoxe, the latter tried to put half the Atlantic between him and his enemies by fleeing to Iceland, known to the Norse of the ninth and tenth centuries, I understand, as Jöklarland.

"But Olaf and Haakon, it seems, came up with Blödoxe, and the abductor of Thera was compelled to go on to Greenland. Even there, however, he must have been menaced by his pursuers, for he again took to sea and again fled westward. He must, in fact, have dared the Northwest Passage. We know, at any rate, that he, together with his captive and crew, became lost somewhere along those Polar seas west of what you now call Baffin Land. And he got that far, remember, in nothing more than an oak-built skuta with a square-sail of woven wool and a bank of oars along a freeboard little higher than a modern life-boat's."

"And with the lady still aboard?" I questioned, in an effort at levity that for some reason fell short.

"With the lady still aboard," replied Pareso, ignoring my sophomoric mockery. "But for all his brawn and bravery Blödoxe and his queenly blonde captive could not find peace in the world. They threw off their pursuers, it is true, but in their New World they found new enemies. A hostile tribe of natives, whom we know from runic inscriptions only as the Fish-Eaters, opposed and captured this shipload of Norse invaders. There was a battle along some lonely Arctic coast, a battle apparently fought in falling snow, but a battle to the death. We have substantial reasons for believing that, while Blödoxe and Thera were taken prisoners, every last man of that crew, that travel-worn and blood-stained crew, was put to death. But the chief of that tribe of yellow-haired and white-skinned natives, a chief called Ootah, seems to have regarded Thera as too beautiful to be butchered like a walrus. At any rate, he held back his followers and saved her from death, just as he saved Blödoxe, obviously for future torture.

"Now, as far as we can learn, a change took place in Thera's attitude toward her abductor. Instead of hating the man who had carried her so far from her own home and people, she had mysteriously but most unmistakably grown to love him. For after Ootah, the better to hold his prisoners, had retreated from the coast and carried them up into the higher mountainous region toward the western sea, we find Blödoxe, in his extremity, secretly giving Thera a small ivory knife, with which to open a vein in her arm, should the worse come to the worst. So, when Ootah, after due pagan rites, was determined to take Thera as his wife, or as one of his wives, we find the unhappy daughter of Olaf secretly stealing to her sweetheart, where they are found together by Ootah.

"That wily Fish-Eater, instead of thrusting a walrus-spear through the two of them, swallowed his big-chief's wounded pride and cunningly bottled up his natural pagan rage. He announced, instead, that since these two loved each other so deeply, they should mate after the manner of man and woman unwaveringly attached to each other. And once mated, they should be free to seek their own ends and contemplate the fulness of their own happiness.

"The bride, proclaimed Ootah, should be given to her fated groom. But before that final rite, added the chief of the yellow-haired Fish-Eaters, she must be duly prepared for the bridal ceremony, as befitted a queen of such beauty. And whatever else there is doubt about, there is little doubt about the fact that Thera was beautiful, beautiful, I suppose, as Helen of Troy was once beautiful, strangely desired of men, but leaving little happiness in the wake of her loveliness."

"AND she was given to Blödoxe?" I prompted.

"She was given to him," pursued Pareso,

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"after Ootah's women had carried her up to a mountain-top temple, where, it was explained, her bridal-bath was to be prepared for her. But Thera must have suspected Ootah's treachery, for we know that the unhappy woman opened a vein with her little bone dagger, before she slipped into that final sleep of unconsciousness. At any rate, when Blödoxe's bride was delivered to him, she was brought to his side embalmed in ice, white and beautiful, but frozen in a slab of ice as solid as granite. Blödoxe, as we decipher the runes, went mad at that. He—"

"Wait a minute," I interrupted, promptly smelling a rat. "Who was left to write those runes, if, as you say, all of Blödoxe's band were put to death?"

Pareso's opaque eye rested for a moment on my face.

"Who wrote the other runes found at times along your coasts from Umanak down to Vineland? Norse seamen were threading those waters, remember, five centuries before John Davis rediscovered Greenland, as you call it to-day. And it would be natural for compatriots of Blödoxe to pick up his story and leave some record of it. And according to those broken records Blödoxe went mad at this wantom murder of Thera. He burst the deer-thongs with which he was lashed, crushed Ootah's skull with a snow ax and killed many men before he was finally captured and subdued.

"Then what was left of the Fish-Eaters, feeling that this strange blonde woman had been at the root of all their troubles, unceremoniously committed that repugnant white body enclosed in ice to a glacial crevasse, where the eternal snows received it and swallowed it up. And Blödoxe they lashed to a cross of wood, high on a lonely moraine of ice, overlooking the crevasse, where, before he slowly froze to death, he might contemplate the grave of his lost bride."

I don't know how long silence reigned in that room after Pareso had stopped speaking. But I know I sat there for a ponderable stretch of time, doing my best to follow the drift of those strange and barbaric adventures.

"And so they were lost to the world," I heavily observed as I turned the heavy yellow bracelet over in the lamplight.

"You are a fool!" cried Pareso, with quite unexpected vigor.

"I'm at least a sober one," I countered, resenting that open note of scorn.

"She was lost to the world," proclaimed Pareso, pointing to his glassful of shiveled wheat-kernels, "the same as that mummy-wheat was lost to the world when it was committed to an Egyptian sarcophagus in the Valley of Tombs, two thousand years ago."

"I don't quite follow you," I said, oppressed by the heat of the room.

"The grave," intoned Pareso, "has been known to deliver its dead."

I did my best to grope toward some undefined goal which he had already reached.

"Great God!" I gasped at last, "you don't mean you're going to mine a glacier for a dead woman's body?"

"There is no need for that," said Pareso, his lank forefinger resting on the yellow parchment before him. "That task, apparently, has already been performed by the slow processes of time. And death does not always corrupt!"

"But I don't understand," I began.

"You will," asserted the swarthy man at the table, his forefinger tapping along a portion of the abraded parchment map, "when you come with me across those mountains."

"Ah, then I'm to be one of you?" I inquired as Knutsson, sitting up on his bed, began a guttural muttering in the half-light. He had been sweating, apparently, in the heat of the room, and I could see the high lights on his columnar blond neck as he blinked urbanely out at us from his shadowy corner.

"There will be the three of us," said Pareso. And he said it in a voice that had both a touch of finality and a note of mastery in its quietness.

CHAPTER III

THE OVERLAND ROUTE

IT WAS five weeks later that an oddly assorted trio arrived at Edmonton, to begin their long trek toward the Circle. As Edmonton was then the jumping-off place for hordes of prospectors bound overland for the Yukon, our arrival at the busy little wooden town on the Saskatchewan did not attract the attention it might otherwise have done. There were enough strange figures striking out from the rail-head and fighting their way northward that spring.

There were, in fact, far too many of them, for word had already come down of outfits stranded along the trail, of pack-horses dying for want of feed, of camps

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without grub, of telltale wooden grave-crosses along the way of tenderfeet drowning in rapids, of chechachos boiling their dog-harness to keep body and soul together, of destitution and disaster and misery sufficient to head off any migration except one with gold as its motive. For where gold is concerned man is no longer a reasoning being.

Indeed, the Northwest Mounted Police were already examining and passing on each outfit as it set forth, turning back those not properly organized or adequately equipped, since the bones of enough incompetents were already bleaching along that Via Dolorosa. They were also announcing that no further passengers could be accepted by the Mackenzie River steamers, the shallow-draught boats in operation for their brief season on the three divisions of that waterway being booked up to their last square inch of space.

This made a serious hitch in our plans and held us up for almost a month. When Pareso finally decided to go in by way of the Peace and the Pelly, it meant that pack-horses had to be secured, that extra supplies had to be rounded up, and that guides and trailers had to be hired at a time when guides and trailers were by no means easy to find. We finally obtained what seemed to be a promising head-guide in one Louis Pepin, a half-breed whose brother, we were told, had traveled over the same route with Inspector Moodie of the Mounted Police a year or two before. But trouble arose again with the police, who, for reason beyond my comprehension, were suspicious of Pareso and especially determined on an inspection of his supplies. And Pareso had his reasons why they should not nose too closely into the nature of all those supplies.

There was one sturdy and damnably clumsy duffel-bag in particular, waterproofed and double-locked and carefully watched, and precisely what it held was known only to its owner. In it, it is true, I had at one time or another glimpsed strange paraphernalia, surgical instruments and bottles and phials carefully padded against concussion, a bag or two of highly colored beads, trade candy and needles, a box of cheap German mouth-organs and trade watches, a bundle of fire-works wrapped in cotton, a first-aid kit, rubber tubing, a microscope and slides, a couple of extra revolvers, tins of chemicals, one of which I knew to be labeled phosphorus.

There were other unexpected things in that treasure-bag, as I learned later on, such as matches and cigarettes and a box of brass-framed trade mirrors no bigger than a silver dollar and a gross of highly colored silk handkerchiefs and a half-liter of *cognac* and a package or two of Oolong tea—all of which were guarded and preserved and kept intact as meticulously as though they were diamonds from Kimberley. Even when we went hungry, and starvation stalked us along our lonely trails, Pareso would permit no violation of that sacred jumble of curiosities.

Beyond that sealed treasure-bag, however, we were exceptionally well equipped with firearms, carefully concealed in an extra sleeping-bag made of ground-hog fur, our blankets and camp-utensils were of the best, and our food supply was as compact and complete as any I had ever seen assembled for northern "tripping," with an emergency ration of one hundred pounds of the best pemmican. I can perhaps best illustrate the thoroughness of Pareso's preparations by pointing out that instead of burdening ourselves down with sugar, we carried, for sweetening purposes, a small but adequate supply of saccharine.

The police, however, were still mysteriously reluctant to authorize our embarkation and time was an obvious factor in the situation. So, rather than see June slip away without any action, we took French leave of the Mounties, and an hour after midnight set out quietly on our own accord. Even in that latitude the June night held only two or three hours of darkness, and it was not long before we could see ourselves trekking through a pleasant country of rich black loam nicely wooded with clumps of poplar. Knutsson, light-hearted at being finally on the way, sang as he went.

FARTHER on the country became more hilly, with a sandy soil covered with park-like clumps of jack-pine, and as the weather was clear we spent our first night sleeping in the open beside a small lake where we rolled up in our blankets and for a while were kept awake by the loons sporting on the nearby water and the prairie-wolves howling from the distant scrub. But the stars in the green-blue dome above us seemed to shine down with a benignant aloofness; our start had every appearance of being an auspicious one, and it was very pleasant to lie there and watch the faint rose and orange fringe of the Aurora Borealis that floated

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above the Circle, the Circle toward which we were bound.

And all looked fair as two days later we arrived at Athabasca Landing, a busy enough settlement of eight or ten long buildings and a Hudson Bay Company warehouse out of which went the supplies for that northern hinterland and into which drifted back the furs of that sub-arctic wilderness.

While I was leisurely admiring the Athabasca as one of the greatest rivers in America an Indian friend of Pepin quietly approached that *métis* and informed him that a mounted policeman at the landing had been instructed to stop our party before it could embark. At the moment, happily, this corporal was a few miles up the river looking into the horse-stealing activities of an unruly Blackfoot. So for the second time, without ceremony or hesitation, we slipped quietly away into the wilderness, eschewing the haunts of man. We decided to slip over the edge of Nowhere and lose ourselves in that enduring and doubly-welcomed desolation.

We headed for Fort St. John, on the Peace River, by way of Lac Ste. Anne, crossing the Athabasca at its junction with the McLeod. We had, naturally enough, our minor mishaps on the way, dousings in unexpectedly deep fords, bruises and cuts from slides down coulée-banks and falls in heavy timber, infected fly-bites, and sore feet from wet muskeg-travel. Those, however, were all accepted as part of the game. It was not until Pareso broke a small bone in his foot, two days out of St. John, that the first real ill-luck befell us.

It did not seem a serious break, at first, and I considered Pareso unusually clever when he coolly reduced the fracture and afterward made a cast of clay and kiln-baked it into brick. But the pain and the inflammation increased until we were compelled to lay up in camp. We remained there for seven weeks, all told. Pepin and his breed packers deserted us, in the meantime, not because of so much enforced idleness but more because both the Indian and the *métis* is chronically averse to taking long journeys out of his own district. Once we were on our way again we picked up other Indians as we went, but as trackers and packers they were indolent and as guides they were usually inaccurate. We also picked up a fresh horse, here and there, to replace those lost by drowning or by straying away when not properly hobbled. And when we met a pack-train heading back to the landing, persuaded that it was too late to try to get through to the Klondike that season, we held a council of war and discussed our chances in going on.

I knew well enough what a winter in the northern bush would mean, and was all for turning back and making another try in the spring, by the proved route of Skagway and the White Horse Pass. But that was a gateway both too public and too well policed to suit Pareso, who had Knutsson to back him up in the plan of pushing on, getting dog-teams when the snow came, and not showing the white feather after going as far as we had.

So, making a virtue of a necessity, I swung over to their side, and we once more headed into the unknown. Once more we faced the old story of muskeg and spruce and jack-pine ridges, endlessly reproducing themselves. Sometimes we missed the trail, and sometimes we had to make our own trail as we went. When feed ran out and the going grew too rough for pack-train, we shot our horses and dried and smoked the meat for extra rations. We bought canoes from a run-down encampment of Dog-Rib Indians and pounded down one contentious stream only to pole and track up another. And when our canoes were battered and broken beyond repair we built rafts and committed ourselves to a river which I claimed was the Parsnip but Pareso protested was the Sagosun. When that river bore too stubbornly westward we were compelled to leave it and strike northward and face once more the hardship of muskeg and hog-back and timber and rock. The days shortened and the nights grew colder, and now and then snow would fall, and we were troubled for a time by a scattering band of timber-wolves that hung at our heels.

"Jamais arrière!" the gaunt-limbed Pareso had the habit of saying, when things looked darkest.

Then came the freeze-up, changing our world almost overnight and compelling us to call a halt until we could be equipped for winter traveling. We laid up in a valley where, providentially, there were conies and white-fish in the near-by waters and moose and deer and bear enough in the surrounding timber to keep us supplied with food. In that same valley, from the last Indian encampment of any size we were to encounter, we bartered for two dog-teams and snow-shoes and moccasins and enough squaw-sewn fur garments to keep warmth in our bodies. And on we

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floundered again, heading deeper and deeper into the unknown North. Pareso, whose strength and endurance was a matter of wonder to me, claimed stoutly enough that he retained a working knowledge of both our direction and our destination. But there were days when I had my doubts about this. And the isolation and the hardships and the strangeness of the country we were traversing began to get on our nerves.

I NO LONGER kept track of time. I began to feel like a man who has died and changed his world, as the Chinese put it. Everything about me seemed to take on a touch of unreality. Sometimes the mountains would close in on us and sometimes we would find ourselves on a windy plateau without a sign of life or a promise of growth. Sometimes we hacked our way through tangled timber and sometimes we broke trail over frozen muskeg and windswept tundra cushioned with moss topped by a meringue of drift-snow.

Sometimes we encountered caribou and sheep, and once, after mounting a wooded slope and staring over a rock-face, I looked down on a herd of musk-ox, shaggy and sullen in the driving snow, impressing me as I stared at them as something prehistoric, as belonging to another age, as out of place before my startled twentieth-century eyes as might have been a group of mastodons shuffling along under the lip of a mountain glacier.

And when Knutsson came clambering up to my side, Knutsson in ragged furs and tawny gold hair that had grown halfway down to his shoulders and a beard of deeper gold on his unshaved face, I felt that he too truly belonged to some rougher and earlier age.

That sense of unreality in everything about me did not diminish with the lengthening of the days and the passing of the winter. For by this time I knew, as well as Pareso himself knew, that we were all hopelessly lost in that northern wilderness. It was that knowledge, I think, even more than the meagerness of our food and the monotony of our labor, that rankled in my heart and soured my mind. I felt that I had been betrayed, that I had been carried forth on a fool's errand, and that the ignominy of our end would be well in keeping with the craziness of our judgment.

That inner bitterness even made me impervious to the more trivial ills of the body, for when I fell and cut my shoulder on a rock-fang I made no effort to cleanse or tend the wound. Through some strange perversity of spirit, in fact, I exulted in this additional pain that crowned the duller discomfort of the gall-sores from the heavy pack I still had to carry.

Pareso, whatever his own thoughts, was the one member of the party who never considered failure and never actually surrendered to despair. *"Jamais arrière!"* was his stubbornly repeated cry. And there still remained, to me, something of the magician about him. When the giant-framed Knutsson fell, in his weakened condition, headlong into a stream we were fording, and, held down by his pack, was dragged ashore with every aspect of a drowned man, it was Pareso who unlocked his duffel-bag and produced a collapsible pulmotor and worked over the unconscious blond figure and brought the breath of life back into the mumbling big body, just as it had been Pareso who, when my feet were frozen while trailing wet-legged over one of the mountain passes, carefully took the frost from the benumbed flesh and with his hypodermic needle forced some strange drug in under the darkened skin and both soothed away the pain and prevented the gangrene that customarily follows on such an affliction. And it was Pareso, when our rations ran low and game was no longer on range, who boiled our extra moccasins and tump-lines and kept us alive until by sheer good luck the shaking Knutsson brought down a muskox and once more gave us meat.

I don't remember as much about the last few weeks of that journey as I should. A great deal of it seems like a dream, a prolonged nightmare shot through with miseries too sharp to be mere hallucination and daily perils too acute to be entirely forgotten. I was disturbed in mind and wretched in body, soured with discontent, poisoned with the accumulated toxins of fatigue, and continuously feverish, I suspect, from the infected wound on my shoulder. There was one day, I know, when they laid up for me, and another day when Knutsson carried me along on his great heaving shoulders.

It was then that a strange thing happened. I seem to see it mistily, as through a veil, for the fever was still on me, and fantasy and fact had the trick of tangling themselves up in my brain. But as we dropped down into a valley overshadowed by a mountain-peak that belched smoke we stumbled on signs of life, a bit of cleared timberland, a pile of stove-wood,

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a clear-cut trail along a winding river-bank. And there, where we'd dreamed ourselves a hundred miles from a human being, we came on a well built chalet of logs and a tall and saturnine stranger who stood in his doorway studying us with silent and unmistakable hostility. He even declined any response to our salutations, until Pareso, running through his gamut of languages, addressed him in what I afterward learned to be Russian.

Even then there was small unbending on the part of this big and sullen-eyed misanthrope who had hidden himself away in those lonely northern hills. But when he was told that we had a sick man in our party and that it would be inhuman to deny us help, we were tardily and none too graciously admitted to that unexpectedly comfortable wilderness chalet. I was put to bed on an improvised bunk in a corner of the main room and during the week I was taken care of there I both dreamed strange things in my feverish sleep and saw even stranger things during my hours of wakefulness.

Our host, I found, called himself Shashkov and claimed to be a fur-trader from Yakutsk. He had hidden away from the world, I further gathered, because of an affair of honor, which he cared to discuss with neither his friends nor his enemies. He also claimed to be quite alone there. But on that point he was an arrant liar.

From the first, in fact, I had been oppressed by an air of secrecy, of something hidden from view, of whisperings behind closed doors. It was my fever, I tried to tell myself, but I could not entirely rid myself of the impression of a presence carefully withheld from outsiders. And one night when I was hot and restless I got out of bed and wandered aimlessly about looking for water. I opened a door in my wanderings and groped through a small room carpeted with bearskins and opened a second door that showed a larger room lighted by a tall candle. And there, asleep on a pallet draped with soft furs, was a woman.

Her skin was smooth and white and her hair was of burning gold and she seemed to me so lovely, as I stood staring at her, that my feverish heart pounded faster than ever. She was not young, I surmised, but still in the full flower of her womanhood. And about her was something so ample and queenly that my knees quaked and I tried to tell myself that I was dreaming. But I could see her sigh and turn in her sleep. And I knew she was alive and breathing. I knew that even after I had crept back to my wall-side bunk, where I lay forgetful of my thirst and waiting for morning.

WHEN Pareso appeared from the outer log building where he and Knutsson were quartered I motioned for him to come closer.

"There's woman in this house," I said in a husky whisper.

"I know it," he said, with a glance over his shoulder, as though afraid of being overheard.

"Who is she?" I asked.

"That's what I'm trying to find out," acknowledged Pareso. "This Shashkov is a great liar. He knows little about furs. And he stands like a soldier. He was an officer once, mark my words, or I never saw the Imperial Guard on parade."

Nothing more was said, for Shashkov himself came into the room. But his secret went up in thin smoke, the next night, when Knutsson himself blundered into the forbidden room and the hidden woman screamed with fright at the towering blond figure with the flame-colored beard.

There was almost murder done that night, I'm afraid, for by the time Pareso got to the scene Shashkov was going at poor Knutsson, hammer and tongs, with a wolf-knife half as long as his arm. But the beans were spilled, of course. Shashkov could no longer stick to his story about being there alone in the wilderness. And it was no longer necessary for him to keep the woman hidden away. He worked hard enough, however, to keep her in the background.

But that woman wasn't the type to be overlooked. She was too tall and queenly, too spectacularly superb, to be lightly passed by. Her name was Olga Shashkov, and our host claimed her to be his wife, though he was angry with her and suspected her of liking another man. Yet the one thing that puzzled me was her silence, her sustained air of remoteness. I thought, at first, that she was almost without the gift of speech. But I found her, later on, talking with Pareso in Russian, talking in a slow and abstracted manner that made me think of a half-awakened child. He was very gentle and patient with her, and she was childlike, too, in her response to that unexpected kindness. I didn't know it until afterward, but she was an amnesiac. Pareso, who examined her, later explained that she had been treated brutally, that a depression of the

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skull from some cowardly blow had taken away most of her memory. He also expressed the opinion that an operation could relieve the pressure on the brain and probably bring the woman back to normal.

But all talk and thought about such things abruptly ended. I remember, through my mists of fever, a noisy argument between Shashkov and Pareso, and a still noisier scene the following night when that huge and hot-blooded husband encountered Olga Shashkov and Pareso together.

Pareso claimed it was Knutsson who stood at the root of the trouble, but of that I have no means of judging. At any rate there was a fight, a medley of shouts and blows that ended with the sudden bark of a revolver. Pareso came to me and said that we had to get out, that we were hitting the trail again. I seem to remember the strange blonde woman weeping and begging Pareso to be taken along with him. This, however, he later denied.

We had troubles enough as we went battling on, day by day, toward our half-forgotten goal, trekking on through rock and muskeg, through tumultuous unknown waters, through lonely chains of northern lakes and ghostlike streams that tore between ghostlike rocks. We forged ahead, through cushioned tundra and windy upland passes, through driving rain and mosquito-haunted valleys where the sound of our own voices echoed strangely along the thinly timbered slopes.

It seemed to me that all life had become merely one endless trek, that we had gone on in that way for years and years, that we must continue to go on in that way for years and years to come, that we would be crawling Poleward through those sullen latitudes until the end of time, that we were a group of madmen fretting and fighting our way through a wilderness that was without limits and without pity for that puny creature known as man. But still we went on.

The thing became automatic, in time, and my arms could wield a raft-pole when my mind was asleep and my legs could carry me and my pack over broken portages when dream and reality became strangely muddled in my drowsy brain. Yet still we struggled forward. I no longer nursed any sense of direction or destination. I lost all track of time. I became a ghost in a world of ghosts. Sleep resolved itself into merely a slightly deeper lethargy in a timeless lethargy of labor and sweat and weariness. And I grew indifferent as to how the whole thing would end, indifferent even as to how soon it would end.

Clouded as my brain may have been, I was vaguely conscious of a change in Pareso. There was a new grimness in his passion to get on, a new nervous intentness that more than once reminded me of a pointer winding water. I don't know by what signs, or on what grounds, his stubborn but sadly dwindled faith had been restored to him. I could see, however, a change in his manner and a new energy in his movements.

He had need enough of that energy. For on this stretch of the jurney we seemed to be climbing, always climbing. Our last compass had long since been lost in a rapids, but as we headed northwest by north we appeared to be making our way into an engulfing arc of mountainous peaks that bit like white fangs into the thin rind of the Arctic sunsets. And we seemed confronted by the ultimate foolishness of it all when, after a day of incredibly rough going, we found ourselves face to face with an impregnable rock-wall, a series of towering cliffs crowned with

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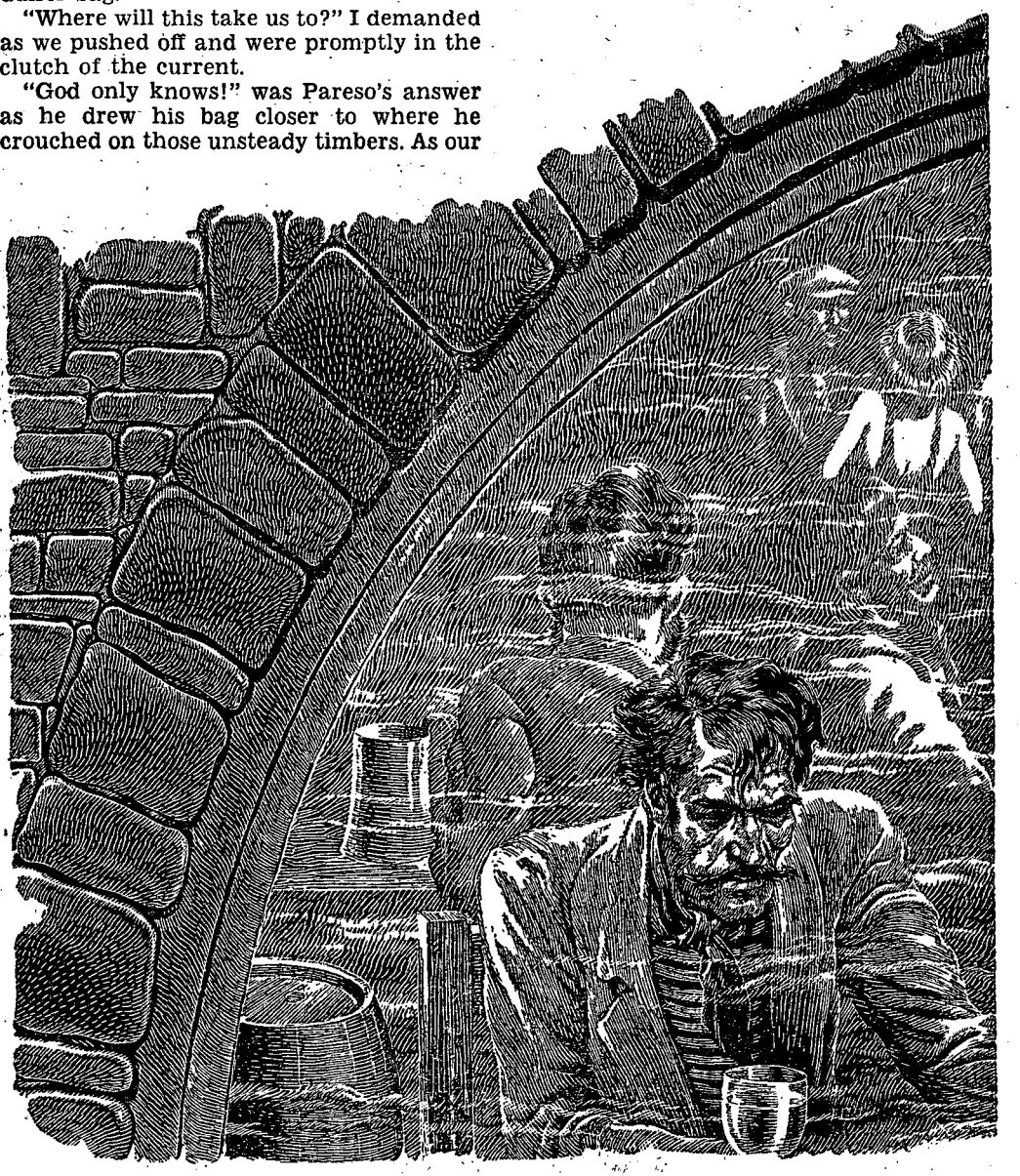
glacial ice that completely blocked our way.

I WAS even able to wring a grim satisfaction out of this *impasse*, until I discovered that Knutsson and Pareso were building a raft on the edge of a turbulent blue-green canyon-stream that twined like a snake through the eroded rock. It was a small raft, for wood was scarce. But we had little left to burden it with, beyond our own tired bodies and Pareso's precious duffel-bag.

"Where will this take us to?" I demanded as we pushed off and were promptly in the clutch of the current.

"God only knows!" was Pareso's answer as he drew his bag closer to where he crouched on those unsteady timbers. As our stream curled like a boa-constrictor between its smooth malachite-green walls the banks narrowed and we found ourselves in a deeper canyon, a boiling canyon to which we were as definitely committed as though we had flung ourselves over a cliffside.

Whatever lay before us, there was now no escape from it. And as we raced on, helpless, with the mist in our faces and the echoing roar of water in our ears and the narrow walls still deepening on either side



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A visit to French Annie's would bring me information about a certain Chinese smuggling coup. . . .

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of us, I felt that we were indeed reaching the end of our long trail.

It would be anything but a happy end, I could foresee, yet I remained singularly undisturbed by the thought that my earthly troubles were about to be over. I did not even cry out as the narrowing slit of light above us closed in and suddenly became a tunnel-roof, as this roof dipped and lowered over our racing heads, as our crouching shoulders brushed it as we were swept along. But when all space ended abruptly, and our river seemed to sink bodily down through solid rock, and we were drawn into that singing black vortex, I instinctively clung to the first thing that offered. I thought, in my bewilderment, that my arms were clasped about one of the logs of the raft, broken free.

Then, as I vainly fought for a breath of air, I thought it was Knutsson's huge leg to which I was clamped. But as I found myself vomited out into light again I realized that I was clinging to the duffel-bag and floating, numbed and bruised, along a ripple of glacial-green water that spread fanlike over a series of widening gravel-bars and went singing down the side of a singularly green valley.

It was the huge Knutsson who waded knee-deep into the shallows and dragged me and the bag from the water, for I was too shaken and sick to make further effort to save myself. Then he went after Pareso, who lay half in and half out of the sucking green eddies, and carried him up a gentle moss-slope, where we all lay shivering and coughing the water from our lungs.

I rather thought, at first, that I had died and gone to a heaven which I in no wise merited or expected, and I was perfectly content to lie there and luxuriate in my vague consciousness of escape from cold and violence. But I was wakened by a cry from Knutsson's lips as he stood above us, pointing out over the soft wide valley that seemed etherealized by the thinning gold of the evening light. And the only thing in any way familiar about that spectral landscape was the Chinook Arch spanning its tranquil evening sky.

"Smoke!" said Knutsson as he stared out over the soft green lowlands beyond which again we could see the glitter of the encircling remote mountaintops.

"That means we can get grub," I said as I sat up, remembering my hunger. But I was startled by a laugh from Pareso. It was not a loud laugh. Yet there was something infinitely scornful about it, for all its undertone of triumph.

"You'll get more than grub here," he said as he dragged himself closer to his dripping bag and hung an arm over it as one hangs an arm over an animal greatly loved.

"Well, grub's enough for me, just now," I moodily retorted, resentful, I suppose, of the other's superior tone.

"Look," Pareso cried as he started up and swung Knutsson about to where the now lowering sun shone bright on a scattering of points and domes and small minarets that growed through the horizon-blue of the lower valley-bowl. "He's talking about grub when he's face to face with more gold than ever came out of the Indies!"

I thought I discerned movement through those far-off valley mists, flashes of gilt that came and went, gleams of fire that faded almost as soon as they were born.

Yet it was Pareso's face, as he stood there with a hungry look in his cavernous eyes and a sourly triumphant smile about his thin lips, that finally brought the truth of the matter home to me.

"What is it we've found?" I asked.

"We've found our Lost Tribe!" proclaimed Pareso, and he stood with his hands folded over his chest, staring off into the distance where lay that strange kingdom he had traveled so far to conquer.

CHAPTER IV

WE ENCOUNTER A WOMAN

WE FARED better, that first night in our new surroundings, than three such castaways might have expected. In searching through those volcanic rock-ridges for a ravine where we might build a fire without observation from the valley below, I stumbled on a small series of hot springs that were as welcome as a box-stove to a winter traveler. Such things, I was to learn later, were no uncommon occurrence in that particular valley or in Alaska as a whole, and had not a little to do with the temperateness of local climates, though that first discovery of steaming water boiling up out of rock-fissures rather took my breath away.

Then, thanks to Pareso's treasured bag, from which its owner extracted two Smith and Wesson revolvers, Knutsson was able to venture slightly lower down the valley-slope, where he shot a mountain sheep. When he returned with the animal over his shoulder he reported that there were many sheep in the lower levels and that,

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instead of fleeing at his approach, they gave every evidence of being domesticated.

So we dined prodigiously, if simply, that night, on spitted sheep-meat roasted over our camp fire coals. And having eaten our fill, we flung ourselves on the warm rock-bed of that skyey retreat and slept the sleep of utter weariness.

Hard as that bed was, the sun had swung high in the heavens before I opened my eyes and lay staring up at a sky of the palest robin's-egg blue. Six paces away from me sat Pareso, contentedly munching on a charred shank-bone of mutton, leisurely studying one of his tattered charts as he ate. And at one of the more tempered pools crowned with mist in the limpid morning air Knutsson was bathing his huge naked body, emitting small animal-like grunts of satisfaction as he laved in that tepid water.

It made a scene oddly intimate and commonplace for a setting so strange, and I sat up, still a little bewildered, staring about me. I even scrambled to my feet and mounted a higher rock-ledge where I could see the wide green bowl of the valley with a light fleece of amethyst-tinted fog still covering its center and a lingering morning mist still bending the feathered-grass and willows along the nearer slopes. It looked so strangely peaceful, so unexpected and Edenic in its softer contour of verdure and color, that I climbed still higher to get a better view of that wide amphitheater of misted valley-lands so mysteriously shut in by its guardian circle of snow-capped mountains.

"You might be seen up there," Pareso warned me. "And I don't want that until we are ready for them."

"Who might see me?" I asked as I squatted beside him and reached for some of the browned rib-meat that lay on the rocks between us.

"These polar blonds that we're going to king it over for a time," was his indifferent answer as he searched in his duffel-bag and brought out a pair of binoculars in a worn leather case.

"Are they blonds?" I asked, watching him as he opened the glasses and tested them.

"Unless our prophet of four centuries ago is a liar, they are," asserted Pareso. "And if a long-range study is going to help us, I'm soon going to tell you more about them."

He left me there and climbed cautiously up to a rocky pinnacle, where he perched as motionless as an eagle, patiently studying the far-rolling landscape that lay beneath him. What he saw there to hold him so intent I could not tell. But even with the naked eye I could decipher, where practically the last of the morning mist had rolled away, a huddled miniature of roofs overhung with a thin gray crown of smoke.

I could not be sure whether these were teepees or topicks or igloos, but the magnitude of the settlement amazed me.

And I noticed that these homes, if homes they were, stood clustered along a series of converging trails that met in a concourse where a more imposing building flashed bright in the slanting sunlight. I could even make out faint signs of movement, in the shimmer of the morning sun on bright metal in transit from point to point, the flowing gray of what seemed to be a flock of sheep moving slowly out toward the upper hills where I watched.

So alluring was that prospect and so curious was my mind as to the meaning of those far-off movements that I quietly shifted along a lateral rock-ridge and crept away, until I was well out of sight of my companions. Then I even more cautiously descended the broken slopes, making it a point to keep under cover. I don't know what influences were at work to produce the impression that began to creep over me, but I felt as I went that I was pioneering into a strange country where no man of my own world had ever before ventured. And that persistent illusion of other-worldness seemed complete when I emerged from a sheltering arroyo and traversed a whispering grove of poplars and came face to face with a slender-bodied dryad studying a splotch of blood on the greensward.

Her hair, plaited Indian-fashion about her head, was a golden-yellow, the color of ripened wheat. She stood little taller than a well-grown child yet there were lines of womanly development about the meditative and lithely poised body. She wore, I noticed, a sleeveless smock of roughly woven homespun, low in the neck and laced with thongs of dyed leather up the front. This smock came scarcely to her knees, and on her feet were gold-beaded moccasins of tanned hide.

She was fair of skin for a person presumably of Eskimo or Indian origin. That skin of hers, in fact, was of a smooth and dusky gardenia tint, too warm in tone to be called ivory, too touched with sun and weather to be called pallid. And it wasn't

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until she looked up at me, and stared into my face with startled round eyes, that I noticed the blue of her own eyes, the quiet and misty blue of the northern zenith on an afternoon of Indian summer.

She stood there staring at me, more in wonder than in fear; and rather than frighten her away I shrank back, with the timeless and instinctive peace-gesture of the upraised hand with the palm outward.

She, oddly enough, repeated that gesture, though her thoughts did not seem centered on the movement. Yet I was troubled when with her other hand she pointed mutely to the bloodstains on the grass.

"I'm sorry about that," I said, remembering Knutsson's slaughtered sheep. Although she obviously could not understand my words, I think she realized the contriteness of my attitude, for I wanted her neither to hate me nor to be afraid of me. It was, I suppose, so many long months in the wilderness, so many nights and days without the softening vision of a woman along our trails, that threw an unnatural glamour about the tense small figure with the heavy bands of gold on wrists and ankles and the yellow gleam of gold in the tunic-embroidering. But she looked wonderful to me.

She was gone, however, before I could speak again. She was scuttering down the broken hillslopes with the speed of a child who had seen a ghost, never once looking back until she was under the cover of a little congress of white birches. To go after her, I knew, would be foolish and futile. And although I decided to say nothing about that encounter to Pareso and Knutsson, for obvious reasons, it gave me a great deal to think about as I made my way back to our hilltop retreat.

THERE, however, I found Knutsson busy shaving himself and trimming his ragged locks in front of a broken pocket-mirror and Pareso occupied in reassembling the contents of his precious duffel-bag. He somewhat surprised me by handing out to me a second revolver and a box of cartridges, with the warning that the firearm was to be used only in case of emergency and that under no circumstances was the ammunition to be wasted.

He even passed me a needle and thread and a band of buckskin and showed me how to fashion a holster for carrying the six-shooter at my side. He himself, I noticed, had reclaimed the other revolver from Knutsson and carried it thrust in a belt-loop at his waist. And when, later in the day, he ventured down the mountainside to make further observations of his own, I occupied myself in bathing and mending and washing my clothing and shaving with the party razor on which Knutsson's stubble had left none too keen an edge.

Knutsson himself, while I was thus engaged, must have slipped quietly away from our camping-place, for when I looked about for him he was nowhere in sight. All thought on the matter, however, was interrupted by a hoarse grunt of triumph behind me as the great form of Knutsson came lumbering up the trail.

But what froze me to the spot was the discovery that he did not come alone. For flung over his great shoulder was a slender figure in a homespun tunic embroidered with gold.

I could see Knutsson swing her about and hold her at arm's length, with her back against the flat rock behind her. He held her there, his eyes alight with a sort of animal exultation, a smile of triumph on his laughing red lips. And the captured girl, cringing back against the rock-wall, stared at him as I have seen a fluttered bird stare at a coiled snake. In her wide eyes I could see terror and wonder and awe, all tangled up together. Her body shook as one great blond hand, caressing the smooth skin of her forearm, moved appropriatingly up to the slope of her rounded shoulder.

I felt the blood sing in my ears as I sprang toward Knutsson and tried to tear his clutch from that shrinking figure.

"Let her go, you damned bullock!"

But I was powerless before his strength. The berserker laughter was still on his face as he brushed me aside, with one sweep of his huge paw.

"This is my woman!" he proclaimed. But as he drew the writhing girl closer toward him I felt something snap at the base of my brain.

"Stop!" I shouted, with my revolver out and the point of its barrel pressed in against his heaving side. "Stop, or I'll put a hole through you where you stand!"

He twisted about and looked at the firearm. Then his slightly bewildered eyes studied my face.

"She's mine!" he said with a protesting sort of sullenness, shifting away from the barrel-end against his ribs.

"Quick," I retorted, shaking a little with the feeling that was too much for me. "Get

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your hands off her or you'll get a bullet in your heart."

He turned slowly about and saw the revolver leveled at his breast, and saw, I suppose, also the hot determination on my face. There was no answering rage in his opaque blue eyes. It was more protest and indignation at an injustice as unexpected as it was unreasonable. He even began to argue about it, in his full-throated gutturals, but I wasn't interested, at the moment, in what he had to say. For I could see that the native girl, with even deeper wonder in her eyes, was edging silently along the rock-wall behind him. And once she saw the way open for her, she circled about and ran. She ran down the broken slopes as light-footed as a fawn.

I started after her, and Knutsson, for reasons best known to himself, followed me. We were both considerably surprised, I think, when Pareso appeared from behind one of the lateral wooded ridges in front of us. He too tried to head off the flying figure, but the girl in the homespun tunic swerved and sped past him. The next moment I saw him wheel about, whip his revolver from its belt-loop, and level it at the flying figure.

I was beside him before he could be sure of his aim, and as he pulled the trigger I struck at his outstretched arm. The weapon went off, the bullet plowing into the soil not ten paces from where we stood. But the flying figure kept on its way. And Pareso stood there with something oddly akin to hate on his swarthy face as he stared at me.

"You fool!" he cried. "Oh, you fool, to spoil everything like that!"

"I couldn't see you murder that woman," I contended as I stared down the valley into which she had already disappeared.

"I suppose you prefer to see that happen to the three of us," he said as he strode back and forth. "There are nearly two thousand men down there in her tribe, and how long will it take, do you suppose, for an empty-headed woman to tell them what she's seen?"

"Then talk to Knutsson about that," I cried out. "He brought her up here!"

But Pareso, apparently, had his reasons for not being quite so outspoken with his pampered big Swede.

"It's her getting away alive that counts," he asserted as he swung back to me. "She should have been shot down in her tracks."

"What good would that have done?" I demanded, rankling with the cold injustice of such a course.

"It would have given us a chance to get ready for an ordeal that's going to be none too pleasant when it comes. Do you realize we've got to face that tribe and cow them into accepting us as their superiors? Do you realize that one false play will say good-night to this excursion and give us exactly what your old friend Valiquette got?"

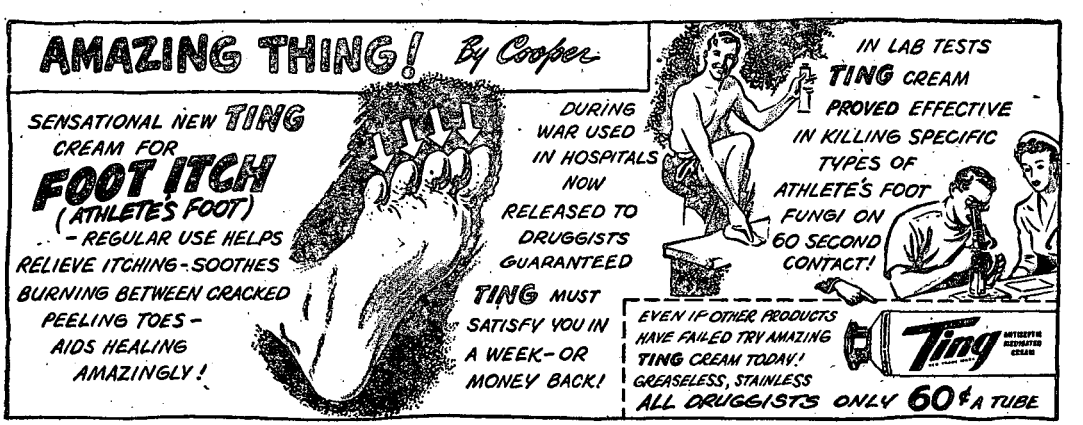
I knew well enough what he meant. But I considered it a bad beginning to start with a woman's blood on our hands, and I told him so.

"We will have a great deal more than the blood of a sheep-herding squaw on our hands before we're through with this job," was Pareso's still embittered response. "And the only thing for us to do now is to get busy. For between now and sunrise, we've got to give a brand new god to those blond Eskimos and get the whole fire-eating tribe so they'll sip out of our hand!"

"And who's the god you're going to give them?" I asked as I followed Pareso up to our hill-camp.

"Knutsson, of course," was his curt reply.

I turned and studied the huge blond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Swede as he scraped about the fire-ashes for a remaining morsel or two of grilled mutton.

"And supposing they don't accept your tuppeny tin god?" I inquired as I watched Pareso unlock his precious duffel-bag once more.

"It's my business to make them," retorted that squat and swarthy figure.

IT WASN'T long before I had a fairly comprehensive grasp of Pareso's intentions. His long-distance study of the valley had persuaded him that the larger building at the center of the concourse was a tribal temple, since he had twice seen groups of figures going through a sort of drill before a platform on which stood some bright but undecipherable metal object of worship. Yet there was a second and more remote temple, apparently, for he had observed streams of ant-like figures going up the farther mountain-slope and returning again from some spot beyond the range of his glass.

Our descent from the hills, however, could not be undertaken until sleep had fallen over the settlement and the brief northern darkness had come to shroud our approach. The hour after midnight, too, was deemed the most suitable for the exploitation of Pareso's supernatural effects. So it became necessary for us, even before comparative darkness covered our broken hill-slopes, to work our way down toward the lower levels, where we advanced like scouts in hostile territory. Yet my heart beat faster as we crept closer and closer to what proved a much larger settlement than I had expected. I could even feel an odd stirring of nerve-ends as we passed like shadows between the long lines of topicks or lodges or kraals that held so many sleepers. These kraals, as far as I could make out, were built of timber and tanned hides, the wood fantastically carved and stained, and the narrow passageways between them as orderly as the streets of a city.

Once my blood ran cold, for behind the rawhide curtain against which I stood rose the midnight crying of a hungry infant, followed by a few words in a crooning voice. Once, too, Paresco emitted a short hiss of warning to Knutsson, who was carrying the heavy treasure-bag on his shoulder, as the latter cursed softly in the darkness after stumbling over a pet kid tethered to a kraal-post.

But we managed to reach the empty concourse without interruption and while Knutsson and I stood on guard, Pareso forced an entrance into the temple and finally whispered for us to follow him. I had scant time to study the interior of this grotesquely beamed building, though even in the hurry of our preparations I caught sight of strange effigies cast or carved out of what appeared to be solid gold, and a sort of altar, also of gold, hung with woven cloth fringed with polished points of walrus ivory. For my first duty was to hold an electric flashlight while Pareso completed his transfiguration of the placid-eyed Knutsson.

The big Swede's lower limbs, to this end, had already been painted with gold-leaf dissolved in banana-oil, and the upper portions of the huge blond frame Pareso now proceeded to cover with a luminous phosphorus solution. This made even my own eyes widen a little at the uncanny effect in the darkness, once my lamp was switched off. With what remained of the phosphorus Pareso touched up my own humble apparel, smearing enough of it on my face to make me sneeze and then hurriedly ornamenting his own person until we made an illuminated trio rather resembling something recently escaped from the Lower Regions.

But there was precious little humor in the picture for any of us, since the most difficult part of the performance had yet to be faced. That came after Pareso had carefully explored the platform before the temple and found that high on a dais covered with hammered gold, between two cressets of gold, stood an eagle of the same precious metal, as uncouthly contrived as the carving on a totem-pole head. Under this Pareso placed a charge of explosive connected with a time-fuse, and on either outer corner of the platform, between a second noise-bomb, he planted a quantity of Greek-fire, with whispered instructions that I was to set it off when he said so, and not before.

Then, having disposed four Roman candles about the rear of the platform, he abstracted a box of parlor matches from his treasure-bag, before showing me how the bag itself should be secreted under the altar boards at the inner end of the temple, where a ceaselessly flowing spring provided a sort of drinking-font for the faithful. Then, after whispering a few final instructions to Knutsson and me, our chief stood for a silent minute or two on the outer platform, staring about at the sleeping kraals, at the pallid distant peaks behind which the green and opal waves

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of the Northern Lights were playing.

"And here's where the show starts!" he said in a voice so offhanded and quiet at the moment it made me feel a little ashamed of the chills spidering up and down my own backbone.

But I had scant time to think about my own feelings, for I could see him as he stepped forward and struck a match and applied the flame to the fuse-end on the noise-bomb. The silence, a moment later, was torn by a roar of sound that echoed and reechoed still again between the mountain-slopes behind us. And that deeper sound, as it subsided like a tennis-ball in a series of ever-diminishing rebounds, was taken up by a newer and nearer sound. This was composed of a growing chorus of shrieks and wails from the startled sleepers all about us, calls and shouts of terror rising above cries of wonder.

And when the still darkened concourse began to fill with crowding shadows Pareso and I set off the Roman candles. A long moan broke from the assembling tribe at that unearthly exhibition, and before it had quite died away my stage director called to me to light the Greek-fire while he himself touched off the fuse beneath the eagle-god on the dais of-hammered gold.

I did as I was ordered. Yet, at the same moment that my fingers set flame to the chemical, something whizzed past my ear so close to my stooping face that I could feel the breath of its movement. As I swung about I saw that a spear, long and heavy-headed and slender of shaft, had imbedded its point in the platform timber beside me.

I could see, in the mounting red glow of the fire, the still poised figure of the thrower, the forward-thrust right arm, the whites of the watching hostile eyes under the frowning brow. I reached for my revolver, under some tugging impulse of protection, and would have shot the half-naked fool where he stood, had not Pareso called out sharply to me. For by this time, high up on the dais from which their ancient idol had been so miraculously blown, Pareso had planted the immense iridescent figure of Karl Knutsson.

The huge blond figure stood there, shrouded in the supernatural glow of his phosphorus-coat, played on by the flames of the Greek-fire. And a silence settled over the crowd confronting us. With a movement oddly concerted that assemblage of half-clad natives fell to their knees and leaned forward until their brows touched the ground. And as I wiped the stinking phosphorus from my face Pareso mounted the platform with his flash-light in his hand and, sweeping that sea of upturned faces, spoke to them in a reassuring voice.

WHAT words he said I have no means of telling, for he spoke in a tongue quite unknown to me. For that matter I suspect that it was largely unknown to his listeners. But they seemed to gather, in the end, the purport of what he was trying to tell them, for, instead of continuing to shrink away, they slowly drew closer. And Knutsson was thereupon told to step down to the edge of the platform, where Pareso started things off by meekly stooping and kissing that big Swede's freshly gilded foot, with a muttered aside for me to be as prompt in doing the same.

So I swallowed my gorge and brought my lips as close to the gilded shin-bone as my pride would permit and circled promptly about to the back of the platform in time to see what must have been the chief of the tribe, a sinewy old man with hair as colorless as shredded hemp rope, shuffle muttering up to the great gilded foot and bend low over it. But figure by figure, as the Greek-fire burned low, they came in single file, making obeisance and seeming to like the smell of the banana-oil. And while that prolonged ceremonial was under way the darkness of midnight slowly merged into the faint gray of promised dawn.

Many of those tribesmen, I noticed, had come with either long-handled spears or short bows at their sides. And although they were neither terrifying in stature nor openly hostile of face, there was no knowing to what ends mob-impulse might at any moment drive them. But Pareso, apparently, was leaving no ragged ends to his entertainment, for he was once more up on the platform haranguing them.

He seemed to be telling them, as far as I could judge, that this new god had been sent to them in answer to prophecy, that he was there to counsel and protect them and do away with the witchcraft of the false gods that were gone, the gods who had neither the gifts of speech or movement nor the power to strike death from the fire-stick of the immortals. To bring this still closer home to them, the speaker, noticing an early-stirring ewe-sheep that had wandered into the open square, thrust his loaded revolver into Knutsson's hand

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and commanded him to kill the animal.

There was not a stir in the crowd as Knutsson, craftily enough, waited a moment or two until the idly straying ewe advanced still closer to the platform, the marksman in question being none too sure of his aim. Then Knutsson pulled the trigger, and, largely through what I accepted as more luck than skill, bowled over the animal.

A gasp went up from the crowd, the more impressionable of the spectators once more prostrating themselves before the big blond on the dais, the more curious examining the dead sheep. It was the old chief who then shuffled forward and by sign and gesture conveyed his wish that the magic be repeated, this time on a comely young woman who stood but a few paces away from him.

So Pareso was compelled to point out, as best he could, that the wilful taking of human life was strictly against the new god's law and that an untimely end would overtake the person violating that law. While the old chief was still in the foreground, in fact, Pareso beckoned him up to the edge of the platform, where, taking out his box of safety-matches, he gravely presented the crafty-eyed old man with a single match and with equal solemnity passed one over to me.

"This," proclaimed Pareso, "is to show who the true worker of big medicine may be." He then pantomimed for the chief to strike his match-end on a small stone. The result, of course, was the mere breaking of the slender match-stalk. But when Pareso took the stone, and, holding his match-box close beside it, struck fire apparently out of thin air, murmurs of wonder and admiration went up from the lingering throng. When he passed the stone and match-box to me, and I repeated the operation, the murmurs were neither so long nor so loud. But Pareso seized the occasion to make it as clear as he could that he himself, who should be thereafter known as Thunder-Bird, and I, who would henceforward carry the name of Fire-Stone, were the duly appointed high priests to the new god that had been given to them.

It was then that the old chief, Attapok, called a conference of his under-chiefs.

Much talk and powwowing ensued, accordingly, with much whispering and head-wagging about the small circle squatted at the center of the court, from which the women and stragglers had been sent back to their kraals.

So prolonged was that conference, in fact, that Knutsson grew tired of standing at attention and mutteringly complained to Pareso, who himself became so impatient that he finally reached into his pocket and took out a jealously treasured package of cigarettes, one of which he passed over to both Knutsson and myself.

It was four long months since the taste of tobacco had been on my tongue, and I smoked with as much gusto, I think, as either Knutsson or the tired-eyed man now known as Thunder-Bird. But the debating circle, as we blew forth our mellow clouds of smoke in the morning air, suddenly started to their feet, fell back in a slowly receding line, and once more prostrated themselves before the altar-platform.

That last miracle, we saw, had turned the trick. We who ate fire and belched forth smoke were obviously not of the race of mortals. We were beings born in our own far-distant world of mystery, and tribute would be paid to the great new Fire-God as befitted his station. The tribal temple that stood behind us was ours to occupy and use to our own ends. The great Fire-God would be reverenced and worshiped second only to Sookinook herself, who was eternal and had always been with them. But we had only to express a wish and in so far as it lay in the power of the Children of the Uncrossable Mountains, it would be fulfilled.

CHAPTER V

THE MASTER OF MAGIC

A STRANGE life began for us that day. Yet its strangeness, I'm afraid, was not at the time fully apparent to us. For, compared with the tumultuous months that had gone before, our days seemed singularly sedate and ordered.

Knutsson, of course, was confined to the temple, where we did our best to keep him shrouded in as much mystery as his position demanded. But Pareso and I, within certain limits, were able to wander about as we wished. We found, however, that there were certain tribal taboos which we were supposed to respect. The upper mountain-slopes over which we had entered that kingdom, for instance, were known as the Forbidden Hills and ill luck invariably fell upon those who mounted too high along their crests. On the opposing side of the wide valley was a plateau territory known as the Bad Lands, where

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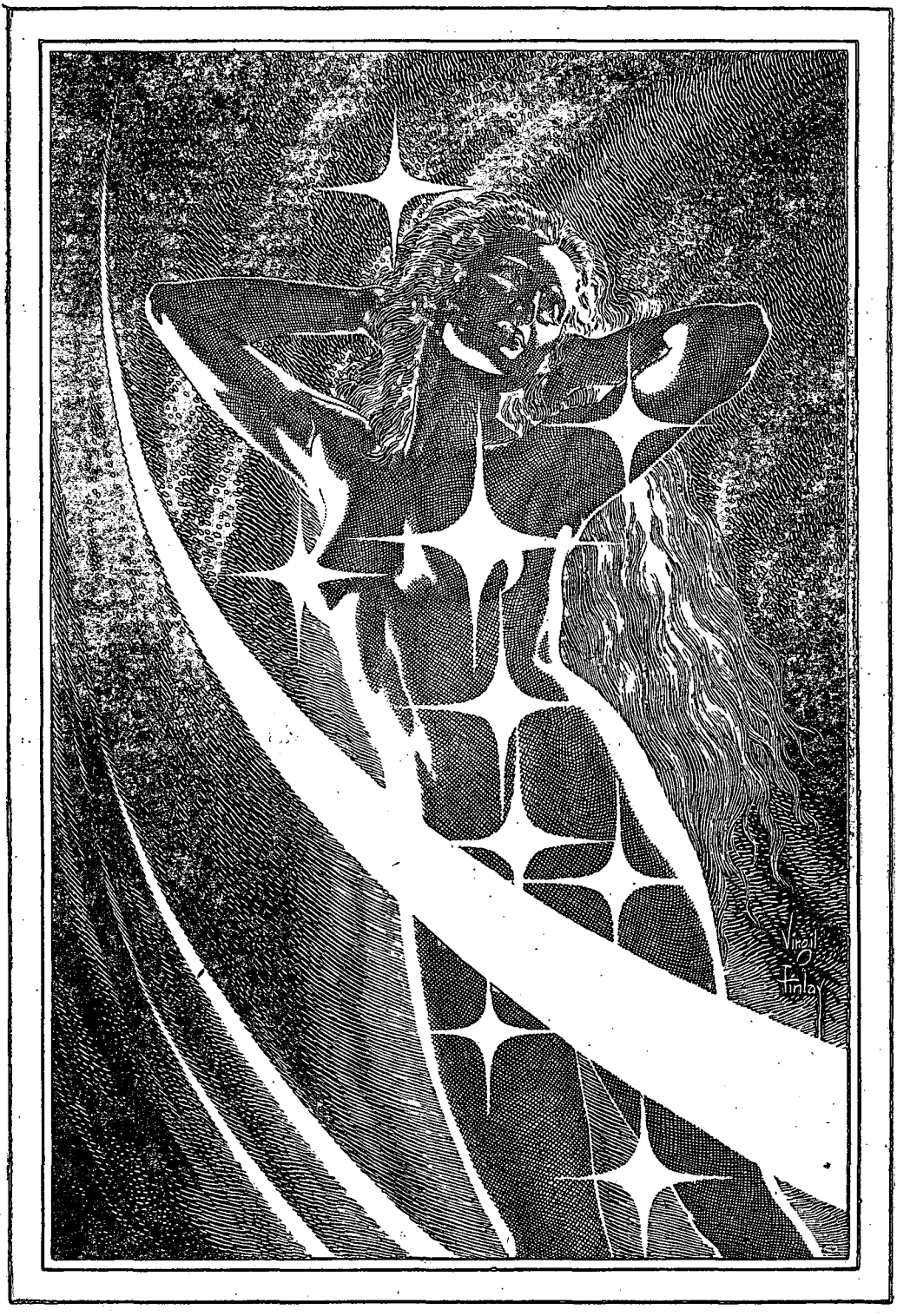

White and beautiful she was, frozen there forever. . . .

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black oil oozed out of the soil and evil spirits put a curse on all who traversed its polluted rocks. For, rich as that territory was in oil, there was a rigid tribal taboo on this stinking fluid of the Infernal One, tradition relating that untold years before a tidal wave of this burning blackness had once descended upon the tribe and all but wiped it out.

Higher up in the hills, in fact, a huge dike had been built to wall back a natural and never-ending seepage of petroleum which now found its escape in some other quarter as it ceaselssly overflowed the malignant black lake. This we were duly warned to shun as we would shun the boiling crater of Kiooka, the dormant volcano beyond it. But I noticed an odd light in Pareso's deep-set eyes when he was first told of that disdained reservoir of energy. A brooding look came into his face, too, when he visited the gold-diggings where the younger men of the tribe worked in languid-moving shifts, uncovering winding seams of the yellow metal as it was needed for their community needs.

Yet even more interesting was the duly acquired information as to the Temple of Sookinook, high above the snow-line on one of the northwestern mountain-slopes. Pareso encountered a fixed reluctance to discuss this mountain temple and was given to understand it was a sanctuary the violation of which was promptly punishable by death. But as he applied himself to mastering certain simpler forms and words of the language—in which, by the way, he unearthed a root or two which he suspected of being of Scandinavian origin, just as he was equally bewildered to find a few French nouns incorporated in that pagan vocabulary—and as he slowly bribed his way into the good graces of the wily old Attapok, he was prompted to conclude that the word "Sookinook" was a corruption of "Sukh-eh-nukh." In earlier Eskimo mythology this was the Golden Woman Who Never Died, and seemed originally to have been a personification of the sun itself, spoken of as the Eternal Maiden of Gold, just as the Greeks once spoke of Phoebus Apollo.

"And what is in this temple high in the hills?" Pareso casually inquired of the aged Attapok, whose heart he had just softened with a cupful of Oolong tea, well-boiled to bring out the flavor, as our supply of the same was strictly limited.

"The goddess herself reposes there," acknowledged the old chief, after a moment of hesitation.

"And who is she?" inquired the high priest so miraculously exhaling cigarette smoke from his nostrils.

Attapok pointed to the golden globe high in the northern heavens.

"The Daughter of the Sun," he said, lowering his head twice toward the ground as he spoke.

"And whence came she?" asked Pareso as he refilled the old chief's cup.

"That no man knoweth," was the answer. "But it was claimed by my father's father that she existed always, that she shall never know death, just as she has never known birth."

"Then she is a woman?" pursued the thoughtful-eyed Pareso.

"Yea, she is a woman," answered Attapok, "yet not a woman, for she is godlike in her bigness as only the true gods are big."

"And what is she like?"

"We are forbidden to speak of her except in words of worship," the high priest of the newer god was solemnly warned. "And it is only after many rites and the attainment of manhood that the chosen ones of our tribe are permitted to look upon her. And that only at each change of the moon."

"Then she is fair?" prompted Pareso.

"So fair," responded Attapok, "that her beauty is as blinding as the beauty of the summer sun when it is first risen above the mountaintops."

Pareso, I noticed, gave much thought to that reply. There was a harder light in his cunning eyes when he finally spoke again.

"But is this goddess, who lives not and dies not, able to work big medicine?" he asked. "Can she arise from her throne and face her people and perform wonders before their eyes?"

"She sleeps on a throne," was the slightly retarded reply, "from which she can never rise."

"Ah, then she is not a living goddess, but a goddess of this yellow metal of which you have so much!"

"Nay," cried old Attapok, "she is of flesh and blood, just as this new god you have brought us is of flesh and blood. Yet she is of gold, too, of gold as bright as any we mold in our kiln-fires."

"But if she has not the gift of speech," persisted Pareso, "how can she comfort and guide you in your moments of doubt?"

"There is a saying almost as old as these hills that surround us," was Attapok's reply, "that on the day our Sookinook is

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removed from her throne this tribe will perish in a wall of fire from above."

The purport of all this I learned, of course, many weeks later. But the effect of it on Pareso's plans I was to learn before the lapse of many days.

IN THE meantime, however, we had problems much closer to hand. For our first disturbing discovery was that Knutsson, being of the higher spirits of the air, was regarded by his worshipers as far above the trivial hungers of the flesh. Food was duly brought to the temple door for his two high priests, but none was brought for the god himself. And the giant-like Knutsson, being always a man of large and active appetite, was not slow to register his disappointment at any such arrangement. So Pareso was driven to solving that problem by having the two of us dine thereafter in private and demanding a considerably heavier ration, which, after exercising the self-denial of the true acolyte, we secretly shared with the anxious-eyed Swede in his sanctuary, now made comfortable with kid-pillows stuffed with swan-feathers.

Also, when Pareso was once assured of his authority, he caused the new god to make it known that the yellow maidens had performed their solemn dance in the concourse, to the sound of drums of different metal so easily removed from the gold-diggings was not abhorrent to him and that on certain days of the week the faithful should bring tribute of the same and place it on the platform before him.

So on stated days, after the tribal rites had been gone through with, after the duly selected tones, some mellow and muffled and some sharper and stirring, and to the strains of pipes made apparently from some animal's shin-bone pierced with stops, the older men would troop dutifully up to the dais and place at Knutsson's feet nodules and nuggets of raw gold from the hillside mines. Other gifts were brought such as folds of soft wool, for the women of the tribe were skilled spinners and weavers of the hair from their tamed mountain-sheep, and such as carved ivory, since certain of the men were very adroit and artful engravers of bone, producing small and strange-looking images not unlike those of the Far East. A certain portion of this ivory, we were even informed, had been obtained from the tusks of three mammoths which had been exposed to the wandering tribe after an earthquake shock had shaken the great hairy bodies free from the glacial ice in which they had been entombed for countless years. Yet the flesh of these creatures remained still firm and sweet, and only after the meat had lain in the open sunlight for a week or two did corruption set in.

That story I was at the time inclined to doubt, until Pareso reminded me that on more than one occasion in northern Siberia these great Pleistocene creatures had been so found, embedded in ice which had preserved intact both flesh, skin and hair. He confided to me, too, his final belief that our tribe was not of remote Asiatic origin, as were the Eskimos of the littoral settlements, but were probably descended from hardy Norse explorers who had perhaps taken native wives and drifted inland in search of a more salubrious climate. Some seismic upheaval, he contended, might even have shut them in that secluded country now so completely surrounded by its ramparting cordilleras.

This was supported, in a way, by the tradition that there were once wolves in that territory, but they had been unknown for many generations. And it was further borne out by the presence there of a deteriorated type of the Rocky Mountain sheep and a small and half-domesticated wapiti from which the women obtained their hides for tanning.

These women themselves, however, were of much more interest to me than were either their animals or their origin. The singularly smooth texture of their skin may have been due to the bathing which they practised in several of the larger of the warm pools dedicated to that service, just as the calisthenic beauty of their small but compact figures must have been due largely to the open-air life they led.

But the unexpected blueness of their eyes and the fairness of their bodies and the ever-arresting tones of polished copper and yellow in their plaited head-dress gave them a deluding air of delicacy, a sense of the doll-like, even an impression of diminished vitality, which was not in accord with either their manual efficiency or their actual physical strength. And the most attractive of them all to me, perhaps for purely subjective reasons, was the slender-bodied sheep-girl whom I had first met up in the Forbidden Hills. Her name, I found, was Ota, and it was her brother Pennekuk who had done his best to put a spear through my ribs on the night we first invaded the Temple of the Golden Eagle.

Ota, I had reason to believe, was not

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altogether unconscious of my existence or altogether ungrateful for the service I had once rendered her. But our chances of being together were limited both by her native shyness and by my official position as a temple attendant, though more than once our eyes had met in prolonging glances of curiosity and more than once I contrived that my movements should take me as close to Ota's side as the occasion would permit.

This must have come to the attention of the wily old Attapok, since he finally suggested that it might be expedient for me to choose from the women of the tribe a companion with whom to study the language of his people. It could be arranged, Attapok gave me to understand, for the trivial matter of an ounce or two of the Thunder-Bird's tea leaves, and if the maid Ota, for instance, met with my approval, she would be found soft-voiced and sufficiently pleasant to listen to.

There was small doubt about my actual feelings in the matter but I was prompted to act with the utmost caution, for with all that show of friendliness from the simple people we had imposed ourselves upon I could not rid myself of the impression that we were being always watched, watched both stealthily and steadily. I even found the courage to mention the matter to Pareso, who regarded me for a moment or two with a slightly sardonic eye and explained that his precious tea could not be spared for ends so trivial, but that I might reward the old chief with one of our "trade" mouth-organs and placate the lady herself with a pink silk handkerchief and a string of blue beads.

Ota, in fact, trembled openly and violently when these were presented to her, being under the impression that she had been duly bought as a slave. When it was explained to her that she was a free woman, she colored perceptibly along her swarthily pale skin and rewarded me with what I was foolish enough to accept as a look of gratitude. And when we began our study of words together she wore the blue beads about her smooth young throat, while the handkerchief, I later discovered, had been quietly appropriated by Attapok, for the secret ornamentation of his own leathery old neck.

TROUBLE, however, was brewing much closer than we imagined. And it arose in a quarter where we should have expected concord. For Knutsson, living as he was in regal indolence, besides growing full-blooded and ampler of girth, became oddly restive and insurrectionary in mood. He even began to nurse certain delusions of grandeur which made him unexpectedly hard to manage. If he was to keep up this play-acting business, he gruffly protested, it was time that a few of his wishes were respected. And when inquiries were made as to the source of his unhappiness it was discovered that the call of the blood was triumphing over the dignity of office. He stubbornly insisted, in fact, on a bride for his solitude.

Both Pareso and I tried to reason with him. But it was of no avail. He was tired of living like a pig in a pen. He'd had about enough of the whole never-ending flubdubbery and unless he could get a little satisfaction out of life he was through with being a two-legged imitation of the rising sun.

So the harried Pareso was compelled to hold another of his tribal cancans, where it was announced that the higher gods were not altogether pleased with our conduct, since we had overlooked maintaining a ceaseless altar-fire in the temple and had neglected consecrating a vestal maiden to attend the same. So after the distribution of the usual placatory gifts from the treasure-bag and after much talk between the under-chiefs, it was agreed that a woman, both young and fair, should be selected for the purpose.

My heart went down like a plummet, however, when I saw that the person duly selected for a wife for Knutsson was Ota—Ota with her smooth skin dusted with powdered pipestone and her shoulders fantastically colored with ocher-paints and her slender body weighed down by a barbaric weight of extra gold amulets and rings and charms, and deep in her eyes a look of immolation which left her impervious to my sudden cry and protest.

Pareso himself must have detected some sinister undercurrent in this strange ceremony, for that night, after Ota had been surrendered for her sacred duties and the concourse was once more empty of people, he went to Knutsson and had a long and none too satisfactory talk with him. And while they talked Ota herself, looking incredibly childlike in her bright metal rings and frescoes of paganly daubed pigments, crept to my side and studied me with quietly luminous eyes.

"Is he truly a god?" she asked me in a voice as soft as a wood-dove's coo.

It was not an easy question for me to

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answer. I owed a certain loyalty, I knew, to my own people, and my life probably depended on my allegiance to them and their plans. Yet the thought of giving this girl in such a marriage was abhorrent to me. It sickened my very soul. But it was a situation in which I was helpless, in which I was worse than helpless.

"He is a god," I equivocated, "even as your Sookinook is truly one of the gods!"

She stood studying my face.

"Then I will be safe in his hands," she finally asserted.

"You will be safe in his hands," I echoed, sick at heart. And before I quite knew what I was doing, I placed my arms about her and drew her close to my side. She did not seem to understand the meaning of my kisses, since they were something unknown to her tribal ways, but I could feel her arms straining about me and I could see the sorrow in her eyes as she drew my face slowly down and held it for a silent moment against her forehead.

"Good-by!" she said in a choked voice as she turned away.

"Good-by!" I repeated as I stood with my hands clenced tight, watching her as she stepped slowly into the temple where I knew Knutsson to be awaiting her. . . .

She came out of that Temple, an hour later, with blood on her mouth. I thought, at first, that Knutsson had struck her. But that was not the case, as both Pareso and I were soon to learn. Instead of striking her, in fact, he had accosted her so endearingly beside her fresh-made altar fire that she had shrunk away from him. And when he had seized her, she had sunk her white carnivorous teeth deep into the flesh of his huge forearm.

It was as I heard her small scream of protest and terror and as she ran white-faced through the temple door that I suddenly lost my head and went berserk. Without being fully conscious of my movements I seized one of the long-headed spears of gold which Pareso had been so sagaciously accumulating from his tribal warriors, and with this I charged straight at the bleeding blond giant, who at the moment stood the embodiment of all evil to me.

Now, Knutsson was no coward, and his strength was plainly twice that of mine, but he obviously had no wish to argue with a crazy man and perhaps find twelve inches of pointed gold thrust through his gizzard. So he made flight the better part of valor and with guttural grunts of protest took to his heels. While Pareso was busy holding back the terror-stricken Ota, Knutsson escaped through the temple door and disappeared in the darkness.

ALL this, not unnaturally, left Pareso in no comfortable frame of mind. He cursed us both for blundering fools and averred we would all get even worse than they had given poor Valiquette. But he left the shaking Ota in my care while he stole forth with a flashlight to search for his runaway god.

He came back, a little before dawn, with no news or trace of the truant; and I could see by his face that the situation was not at all to his liking. He was, however, resourceful enough to call a tribal meeting and proclaim that the Spirit of Fire was so pleased with the appointment of the new priestess that no devotional exercises would be demanded of the people for a few days.

This went off well enough until an interruption came about in the form of a harangue from the hot-eyed young Pennekuk, who seemed to nurse a suspicion that his young sister had been bodily consumed

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and found the courage to demand a glimpse of her still in the flesh.

This, he was solemnly informed, would be duly granted him with the coming of nightfall; and the crowd disappeared, feeling none too kindly toward the recalcitrant Pennekuk. Then I was sent forth to make a quiet search for Knutsson.

I had, of course, to be guarded in my movements and there was a natural limit to the extent of my wandering. They resulted, however, in nothing but failure. And when I returned to the temple that evening, tired and discouraged, I found Pareso decorating Ota with what remained of his phosphorus and preparing her for exhibition on the sacred dais. To this end he had her hold out before her a small vessel filled with what remained of the Greek-fire, to which at the right moment she touched a lighted match. The familiar vocal wave of wonder swept over the assembled crowd, and Pareso, to make sure of his triumph, passed out three small bars of sweetened chocolate among the chiefs most worthy of such a favor.

But for us inside the temple it was not a happy night. Nor did we breathe much easier until the passing of the third day, when, under cover of darkness, Knutsson quietly returned to the temple.

He came back to us an oddly changed man. He seemed, for the first time in his life, humble and meditative and given over to some strange perplexity of the spirit. He paid no attention whatever to the shrinking and watchful-eyed Ota and gave equally little thought to his accumulated food. Pareso did not question him, however, until Ota had retired to her quarters.

"I suppose you know what this will probably cost us?" contended Pareso, fixing him with an accusatory eye.

"I can't see that it counts much, now," was the none too satisfactory answer.

"What has happened to change things?" demanded Pareso.

"I have been to the other temple," Knutsson answered in little more than a whisper, "to the temple of the Sun Woman."

I could see Pareso's color change.

"But that is death—" he began.

Knutsson laughed quietly.

"It was," he rumbled in his huge throat. "It was death to the guard who watches by night and the second guard who watches by day. I choked 'em both with my naked hands. I killed them and tossed them into the crevasse beyond the second icefield. And then I went into the temple."

"And the woman?" asked Pareso.

For a full minute Knutsson sat silent. I could see the light that came into the eyes of brooding blue, the unwilled working of the big blond face where Ota's scratches still showed across the bronze cheek.

"She is there, waiting for us," he said in a whisper that held a touch of awe.

Pareso moved uneasily.

"Were you seen?" he quickly inquired.

"By nobody who remained alive," was his curt response.

Pareso surprised me by getting to his feet, crossing to the temple door, and looking carefully about through the darkness. Having done that, he returned swiftly to our side.

"Now tell me about it," he commanded.

"It is not a matter to be talked about," answered the voice of Knutsson, as abstracted as a sleepwalker's.

"But it must be talked about," persisted Pareso.

"It can't be talked about," was Knutsson's determinedly quiet reply. "But we must go to her while we still live to look upon her beauty!"

"Her beauty?" echoed the other. "What's that to us?"

"When you have seen her, as I have seen her, you will understand."

"And when do you propose that we see her?" was Pareso's almost mocking inquiry. But the touch of scorn in the question, I noticed, drove none of the exaltation out of the meditative blue eyes.

"To-night," was the quietly enunciated answer. "We must go to-night. *Then you'll understand!"*

CHAPTER VI

THE SLEEPING WOMAN

MY MOST persistent feeling, as we set out that night on our strange journey to the Temple of the Sun's Daughter, was a sullen resentment of Knutsson's leadership. I was, I think, vaguely jealous of his importance. But as we fought our way outward and upward, after groping so stealthily through the sleeping setlement without once daring to use our flashlight, I was compelled to admire the sheer animal strength of that big blond Swede who was leading the way. His feet seemed winged with an impatience that made it hard for Pareso and me to keep up with him, and time and time again he was compelled to stop in the darkness and wait for us.

The farther we went, in fact, the harder

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the going became. I could tell easily enough that we were climbing, that we were steadily mounting into higher and cold air. A couple of times, indeed, we got completely off the trail, but Knutsson, weaving back and forth like a setter nosing out a lost quarry-scent, soon led us back to the path and kept us hurrying along at his heels.

"How much farther?" asked Pareso, stopping.

"Another half-mile," answered Knutsson, pointing upward through the northern darkness that is never altogether darkness. And he was off again, doggedly and determinedly.

Our climb, after that, was steeper, a part of it being over steps cut in the rock-face and along a slope of solid ice that ended in a small upland plateau overshadowed by a still higher rampart of snow-capped trappean formation. In the center of this plateau I could dimly make out an oblong lodge of squared timbers, and those timbers, I could see when Pareso played his flashlight along them, were bleached as white as bone and were ornamented at the corners with carvings of gold and ivory. But I had small time to give attention to such details, for Knutsson, with the flashlight in his slightly tremulous hand, was already swinging back the heavy wooden door studded with pins of gold. I could see the intermittent mist of his breath in the cold air, and in the sepulchral gloom in which I found myself as I crowded in after Pareso's body, I noticed a faint shiver of chiliness creep through my blood.

"She's there," whispered Knutsson.

And as Pareso swung his light across the narrow chamber I saw a roughly welded railing of gold that surrounded an oblong of crystal-clear ice, at least nine feet in length and five feet in height. The arresting thing about this dolmen of ice, however, was not its clarity, or the glass-like smoothness of its rounded surface, but the fact that it held at its core the half-recumbent figure of a blond woman.

I was, in a way, not altogether unprepared for some such discovery. But the thing that startled me, that took my breath away and held me spellbound, was the incredibly vivid and lifelike appearance of that half-reclining figure. My next conscious thought was of the marmoreal smoothness and pallor of the skin, for the figure was clad only in cincture and breastplates. The tawny hair seemed compressed into a sculpturesque sort of compactness that might have deceived one as its volume but could take away no part of its coloring. And its coloring was the remarkable, the miraculous thing about it. Once freed, I felt, it would easily have reached to the slightly bent knees in a shower of luminous gold. For it was the most golden gold I had ever looked upon, the sort of gold that, in catching outside light, seems to hold a light of its own.

And that strange sarcophagus of flawless ice, seeming to bring it closer to me even while it walled the wavering radiance away from me, in no way dulled the coiled mass of tawny glory that appeared to lend a warmer afterglow to the very body beside it. I could discern, too, the darker fringe of lashes about the languidly closed eyes.

It wasn't until I looked closer at those duskier-shadowed eyes that I awakened to the calm and regal beauty of the face itself, the smoothness of the untroubled low brow, the perfect contour of the austere oval cheek, the soft womanliness of the rounded chin, and the wistful play of line about the humanizing rich lips.

She was indeed beautiful. She was so mistily beautiful that she made the breath halt and caused the heart to ache. For with all her sense of tranquillity, of timelessness, of majestic calm, she still carried an air of pathos which I found it hard to decipher. She lay before me as benignant and impersonal as the carved Aphrodite that was found in the sands of Milos, but as I stared at the beauty so hopelessly committed to its engulfing cold, I found some phantasmal sense of deprivation, some ghostly sense of loss, tugging forlornly at my heart.

It may have been the heroic size of the figure, or it may have been the depersonalizing smoothness of the marble-like skin, or it may have been the foreigneering effect of the pose, as passive as that of a swimmer in ever-motionless water, but the fact remained that this sleeping blond woman impressed me more as a Norse myth descended to earth again, as a pagan and legendary figure emerging out of the earliest mists of time, as something incredibly strayed out of Valhalla itself.

So absorbed had been my study of her, indeed, that I did not at first notice the human hand enclosed in a smaller block of ice, placed triumphantly on top of the larger crystal oblong. In that hand, which had been severed at the wrist, was clutched a heavy cross of silver.

On Knutsson's face, I saw as I swung about, was something between rapture and devotion. On that massive blond face, in

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fact, I detected a look of reverence which I had never before seen there. And an uneasy stirring of the nerves went through my body, the next moment, when, glancing from the one blond figure to the other, I seemed to catch some mysterious kinship between the two, some confraternity of coloring and build and Viking tawniness of skin and hair. One was full-blooded and earthy; one was etherealized and tranquil, infinitely remote and impersonal in a chill and immuring chastity of light.

IT WAS the sound of Pareso's voice, speaking out of the long unbroken stillness, that brought me turning sharply about to my other companion. What he said I do not remember. But I still remember the narrow-eyed intentness of his stare as he leaned close in against that polished ice-slab. His look was not the look of the worshiper. In it was none of the inarticulate adoration, the mute yearning, of the brawny Swede beside him.

I doubt, in fact, if Pareso stood much impressed by the weird and regal beauty of the figure confronting him. That mysterious blond woman, to him, was merely a magnified specimen in *vitro*, a patient enduring a catalepsy sufficiently prolonged to be perplexing. He even circled about the crystal catafalque and stooped low, grunting with satisfaction.

"It's there, all right," he proclaimed.

"What's there?" I asked, my voice tremulous with more than the cold.

"The wound," he explained, brushing the silent Knutsson aside as he continued his inspection. "The wound she made when she opened that vein with Blodoxe's little bone knife."

Those words, once their meaning had filtered through to my brain, caused me to stare incredulously at the recumbent blond figure. It may have been an accident of light, or it may have been something in my own mind, but that large and flowing body seemed less godlike, less marmoreal and impersonal, as I once more turned and studied it. There seemed a faint tinge of vitality in the softly rounded flesh; and if the broad bosom had heaved and subsided in a quiet sigh of life, it might not have greatly surprised me.

It was Pareso's voice that brought me out of my trance.

"But be pleased to notice where they have put the old boy's hand," he said with a not altogether pleasant laugh as he glanced toward the smaller block of ice crowning the larger.

"Whose hand?" I asked as the rapt Knutsson once more crowded in close to the rough gold balustrade.

"Old Baliquette's, of course," was Pareso's answer. "And it's there as a gentle reminder of what will happen to strangers who get too inquisitive."

It was slightly less clear, that smaller block of ice, than the larger pellucid reliquary that held the warmer-toned figure as suggestive of life as the mutilated member above it was suggestive of violence and death. But I could see the light strike through to the silver crucifix between the ironically prehensile fingers. And it touched me with a sense of tragedies, old and forgotten, an unhappy echo out of times far back along the shadowy corridors of life. I even shivered, in spite of myself, as I speculated on why that crucifix was still held between the fingers where it had no right to hang.

"Shouldn't we be getting back?" I suggested, wondering why life, of a sudden, should seem a frail and tenuous thing.

Pareso went to the portico and peered out.

"Yes, we must go," he agreed. Then he stopped to smile a little as he studied the still rapt Swede beside the railing of gold. "You like her, Karl?" he asked with a levity that seemed out of place in such surroundings.

Knutsson's answer, apparently in his native tongue, was unintelligible to me. But I noticed that his eyes remained on the blond woman as he spoke.

"Ah, then you would prefer this temple?" said Pareso, still with a touch of mockery in his voice.

"Yes," acknowledged Knutsson. And there seemed something almost childlike in his simplicity of note.

"You prefer being with her?"

"Yes," was the low-toned reply.

"But wouldn't you prefer her alive?" pursued the ruminative and narrow-eyed Pareso. "Living and breathing and warm?"

"Yes," answered Knutsson, moving his lips with an effort.

"And what would you do to bring that about?"

Still again the answer was in a tongue unknown to me. But I could see a renewed animal-like glow at the center of Knutsson's widened blue eyes.

"And would you feel that way, to the end?" asked Pareso.

"Yes," answered Knutsson.

"Then I imagine you'll get what you want," said Pareso, more to himself than to

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his companion, apparently, as he snapped shut his pocket-flash and ushered us out through the doorway.

He stood for a moment, looking down over the sleeping valley. I didn't speak for several minutes, as we groped our way down again, for it was no easy matter to find the path in that uncertain light. And there were times when a false step would have meant swift and certain death.

"What are you going to do about it?" I finally asked, my mind still full of the strange figure we had left behind us in the temple.

Instead of answering that question Pareso asked me another.

"Have you ever read Herodotus?" he inquired.

"I hadn't, of course, and I admitted it.

"In that case," he resumed, "you wouldn't know about Pisistratus, who was once Tyrant of Athens and wanted to return to power, to reinstate himself with the public. He was sagacious enough, in doing this, to unearth in one of the Attic villages an exceptionally tall and handsome woman by the name of Phya. He took his woman and dressed her in shining armor and put her on a fine chariot and drove into Athens, proclaiming that the goddess Minerva was bringing him back to her own citadel. And if you know your history you'll recall that the artifice was an entire success and Pisistratus was accepted as coming home with the special favor of heaven."

"And what's that to do with us?" I asked as I followed beside him in the darkness.

"We have a goddess of our own," was his curt reply. "We've got a Phya, and I intend to make use of her."

"To what end?" I asked.

"Good God, man," he said, stopping short, "you don't suppose we're going to stay in this benighted wilderness for all the rest of our life, do you? You don't suppose we've faced all this hardship and peril just for the fun of the thing, do you? There's gold and oil here, gold and oil enough to buy a kingdom. But what good is it all when we're still locked in here with these half-civilized morons who don't know the difference between a parlor match and the fire of Prometheus? There's some way that gold can be packed over the mountains and there's some way that oil can be piped down to the Mackenzie Basin. There must be! But before that's done we've got to show this bunch of pigheaded albino Indians that we're their masters and that we've a right to take over the things they can't appreciate."

STILL AGAIN I caught an inkling of the man's Machiavellian audacity, his casual and crafty self-seeking. But plans such as his, I remembered, had a way of going wrong, of defeating themselves through their own sheer pretentiousness. And when they went wrong they had the habit of dragging down both their mighty Napoleon and his small-potato marshals.

"That may not be so easy as it sounds," I demurred, feeling, for the first time since I had ventured into those northern regions, a sharp ache of homesickness for the life I had left so far behind me, for the quiet and security of the white man's city, for the knowledge that I could sleep in peace and awake without peril at my elbow.

"Well, it's too late to draw back, even if we wanted to," my companion pointed out to me as we trudged on, now along a less precipitous trail. *"Jamais arrière!* And I've pretty well worked out my line of action."

"Then just what," I demanded, "do you propose doing?"

He didn't answer for a minute or two, waiting for the lagging Knutsson to catch up with us.

"Among other things," Pareso said with a quietness that ended to take the strangeness out of the assertion, *"I'm going to bring that woman back to life!"*

He said it casually enough. But I could feel a tingle of nerves go through my body at the uncanniness, the sheer preposterousnes, of such a statement. And I began to feel that running through this man, for all his haphazard skill and happy-go-lucky courage, was a streak of madness.

"And if it can't be done?" I suggested, trying to match his quietnes of tone with my own.

"I've traveled far enough to make the try," he reminded me, with the ghost of a laugh that fell none too pleasantly on my ear.

"But supposing you fail?" I persisted, feeling very much alone in that ghostly northern twilight where the faintly brightening gray prompted us to hurry our steps.

"What's the good of crossing those bridges until we come to them?" was Pareso's retort. "And no matter how it turns out, it needn't be *your* funeral. It's a battle that belongs to Knutsson and me."

"Why Knutsson?" I interrogated as we came to the outer fringe of the kraal settlement.

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"You'll understand that when the time arrives," was all that Pareso would say to me.

"But there's one thing I understand right now," I contended.

"What's that?" demanded Pareso.

"That the dead are dead," I retorted, "and that when they've been that way for a few centuries they're not brought back by a turn of the hand."

Pareso did not answer me until we were back in the temple.

"How do you know that the dead are dead?" he finally challenged.

"In the same way," I answered him, "that I know the other basic facts of life."

Pareso's smile was a forbearing one.

"Facts, my boy, can be less basic than they seem. I'm dead, according to your basic facts, when my heart stops beating. I've gone to another world when the blood stops coursing through my veins, and once I've ceased to breathe, I'm no longer alive. That's your claim. Perhaps! And only perhaps. But I and other men of science have seen a heart stop beating, stop dead, and yet be started again, by outside hands, and the machinery of life go on as before. Respiration can stop, as it must stop when a swimmer goes down and for a quarter of an hour his body lies under water. Yet under right conditions that respiration can be started again and the unconscious patient is brought back to life and the man once more goes about his business in the world."

"Then what *is* life?" I asked.

"That," retorted Pareso, "isn't an easy question to answer. I'd much rather you told *me*."

"Life is consciousness," I cried, resenting my companion's cool-noted condescension.

"By no means," corrected the other; "many of us have been unconscious and remained alive. We do not die when we fall asleep. The hibernating bear is alive. The frozen fish remains a living animal. The sleeping toad immured its unnumbered years in hardening slate, the toad we see unearthed from a mine-drift now and then, comes back to life when he gets a fresh whiff of the essential oxygen."

"I never had the pleasure of seeing one of those extraordinary animals," I said with a shrug.

"No," cried Pareso, "and you never saw a Viking woman who had slept for ten centuries in a Mason jar of glacial-ice, until you saw this woman I'm going to awaken. Yes, it's easy enough to talk about life and death, but it's not so easy to say where the one begins and the other happens to end. It's easy to—"

"But there must be a time," I interrupted, "when a human body is definitely and indisputably dead."

"There is, naturally. But we are not speaking about those who are indisputably dead."

"But there's a *something*," I persisted, "that marks the truly dead from the merely comatose. There's a time, for instance, when a transplanted tree is gone, when no amount of tending and watering will bring any sign of life back into it. And with the human body, at the end, there's a cessation of something; there's a change—and you know it."

"There is, of course, a protoplasmic change in the brain-cells; and that change, I suppose, must in some way mark the ghostly dividing line. But it's never a fixed line, remember. And man is still too much in the dark about such things to chart its curves, to know its nature. It's simply that *nobody knows*. Nobody on this great green earth of ours can finally and definitely say that this mysterious vital spark, this infinitely slender and fragile potentiality of revival, may not slumber dormant at the core of a brain carefully enough removed from all deteriorative influences. *And I intend to find out.*"

CHAPTER VII

A DEATH FOR A DEATH

FROM THAT night forward, I discovered, neither Knutsson nor Pareso remained overly interested in the girl, Ota. Knutsson, in fact, went about like a man in a dream. He seemed to be waiting, always waiting, for some event of great moment. Into the brooding blue eyes even came a look of questioning, of hound-like pathos, which I had never before seen there.

With Pareso it was different. That man of action, I soon saw, had no intention of letting the grass grow under his feet. He disappeared for half a day, sat for another half day deep in thought, and made a preoccupied appraisal of his treasure-bag.

His next move was to call a meeting of old Attapok and the tribal under-chiefs, to whom, before his harangue, he handed out a few pieces of trade-candy.

"The Spirits of the Air are not pleased," he solemnly averred, "with the manner of worship taking place in the Temple of the

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We forged ahead, past ghostlike streams
that tore between ghostlike rocks. . . .

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Eternal Maiden, or with the continued neglect meted out to Sookinook herself. I know nothing of that temple, and I know even less of her who is called the Golden Daughter of the Sun. But it is said that her spirit complains of the cold, and that her sleep has been so long that she has wearied of it."

This proclamation resulted in a closed conference between Atapok and his underchiefs, who sat in a constricted circle at the center of the concourse and talked long and earnestly together.

"The words of the Thunder-Bird are always words of wisdom," the old chief finally proclaimed. "But moon by moon and generation after generation Sookinook has been worshiped in the form in which she was sent to us."

Pareso's smile was a patient one. Yet I could hear him mutter, "An ounce of lead is the medicine you're waiting for, Old Boy!" His voice was suave, however, and his face was tranquil as he continued his harangue.

"But who, O Attapok, is satisfied with a goddess that merely sleeps? And would it not be better to bring this sleeping woman to life, to awaken her from her long slumber and let her stand before you, a living and breathing woman?"

A murmur of dissent ran through the startled circle.

"That, O priest who has come a stranger among us," asserted the old chief, "is neither possible nor desirable. For it is the faith of this tribe that when Sookinook is removed from her throne our people shall perish like grass in the fire. And it is also forbidden that strangers should enter her temple, the penalty for so doing being death."

Pareso gave up, for the time being, but I have every reason to believe he had a later and secret conference with the venal old Attapok, a conference sweetened with trade-candy and ending with a transfer of a few gim-cracks from the duffel-bag. For our leader, returning in high spirits, even tossed me over one of his tin mouth-organs and suggested I teach Ota to play it.

This I willingly enough did. And those hours with Ota, in a sunny niche behind the temple transept, were the happiest I'd known since I entered that country of uncertainties. The girl loved the sounds that came from what she called the Singing Bird Without Wings, and I was not unhappy in watching the softly curved lips blow into the little instrument and the naïve smiles of satisfaction as her pouting mouth traversed the serried vents while she ran up the scale and down again.

I even tried to teach her a tune or two, though she seemed to find no added delight in what we moderns would call melody. And when her rosy lips were tender from rubbing along the roughly fashioned metal, I consoled them with equaly modern kisses, which she liked as much as the music.

But I soon had sterner duties to face. Pennekuk, in fact, appeared before our temple and none too humbly demanded sight of Ota, apparently to reassure himself as to her safety. And when she appeared before him, betraying no evidence of unhappiness, he drew closer and began pouring whispered messages into her ear.

"I don't altogether like the looks of that sour-faced young buck," asserted Pareso as Ota's brother retreated from the concourse, the sunlight glinting on his long spear-head and the bow strapped close to his side. "Something tells me he may possibly meet with an untimely end."

Yet Pennekuk had his power in the tribe, apparently, for, on the same day that Pareso proudly proclaimed old Attapok to be with us, a group of spearmen appeared before the temple with the demand that the young fire-priestess known as Ota should be restored to her people, since the Thunder-Bird was intent on putting an end to the old order of worship under which she had been yielded to his service.

And seeing we had no further use for the girl, Pareso promptly and graciously surrendered her back to her people, though the ceremony became an unexpectedly embarrassing one for me when the weeping Ota suddenly turned and threw her arms about my neck, sobbing out, as she pressed on my lips the kisses of the outlander which I had so painstakingly taught her, that she would never be happy away from the side of her Fire-Stone.

"Ah, a softer note in the drama!" said Pareso as his half-scornful eye watched me while I resolutely enough kissed the girl good-by.

BUT STERNER issues were soon confronting us. Even old Attapok, it seemed, had succumbed to a second wind of suspicion. It was clear, he glibly admitted, that the Woman Who Couldn't Die fretted to be free of her icy tomb, even as the fish frozen in the mountain-stream would be free with the return of the sun. But once freed, she might pass into noth-

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ingness, and he and his people would then be without a tribal goddess to stand between them and the enmity of the air-spirits.

"Nay," was Pareso's prompt reply, "I will bring Sookinook among you and your people, warm and living as one of your own women, and able to work big medicine on your behalf."

"But what proof have we," contended the old chief, "that you have the power to do this thing?"

"Have I not already worked magic in your midst?" demanded our still patient leader.

"You have worked big medicine, O Thunder-Bird," admitted Attapok, "and have brought thunder to our lodge-doors and strange lights into the sky and have even killed by magic before our eyes. But we have not yet seen you bring life out of death."

"Then what pledge do you and your people ask?" was Pareso's somewhat impatient inquiry.

"We demand," retorted Attapok, after a brief consultation with his associates, "that a death shall pay for a death, so that if Sookinook is not made to live and breathe before our eyes, this new Fire-God and his two high priests, being duly proved without the power of life, shall themselves be put to death to appease the air-spirits they have offended."

Pareso was able to laugh at that, though the shiver that sped through my body was far from a pleasant one.

"And what else is demanded of us?" asked our leader, not without a note of irony.

"It is further demanded," pursued the wary-eyed old chief, "that the two fire-sticks now carried by the strangers-from-over-the-hills shall be given into our keeping until such time as our Sookinook shall show herself warm and breathing before us."

"But if we give up our guns—" I whisperingly began.

"Let 'em have the guns, if they want 'em," averred Pareso. "They'll get them without a shell, you may be sure, so there's nothing to worry about. And as for the other matter, I'm willing to take my chance. So it is agreed then, O Chief," resumed Pareso as he turned back to the waiting elders, "for we know whereof we speak and no fear of the outcome dwells in our bodies. Our firesticks shall be committed to your care just as our lives shall be placed in your keeping.

"And in return for that we demand the right of access to the Sun-Temple and the help of your braves in building a medicine-lodge which shall be constructed as the air-spirits duly advise me. And it is further demanded, O Chief, that no man or woman of this tribe shall interfere with the big medicine I am about to work until breath of life comes from the lips of Sookinook."

"Or the plans of Thunder-Bird are seen to come to naught," the squinting-eyed old chief gently reminded him.

"The Thunder-Bird never fails!" cried our pallid-faced leader.

"It is agreed, then," said Attapok, with the casually childlike suggestion that perhaps a cup or two of the white men's tea, well-sweetened with the white powder that slept soft on the tongue, might work a fitting conclusion to the ceremony.

"Boil a little Oolong for the old bird," muttered Pareso as he ushered Knutsson and me back through the temple door. "And the sooner we get this flummery over with the better. For after to-day, my friends, we've got something more than haranguing on our hands!"

PARESO'S preparations, I soon found, were to be both more elaborate and more prolonged than I had expected. Over many of them, it is true, he saw fit to throw a tinge of the ceremonial, so that while certain chosen men of the tribe labored contentedly in the construction of the mountainside medicine-lodge their women worked with equal willingness in the curing of fawn-skins and the weaving of their softest wool for the fashioning of garments ample enough for the body of Sookinook. Garments, I might add, that were ornamented with disks and borders and buckles of yellow gold.

Yet Pareso, with all his air of quiet assurance, could not have been, at heart, as certain of results as he pretended. *"Jamais arrière!"* was his coolly repeated proclamation, but he was not blind in his faith in the future. For while he was making ready the medicine-lodge, which he proposed to heat with cunningly contrived charcoal-stoves, he embarked on sundry surreptitious explorations of the upper mountain-ridges and snow fields, in the hope, he explained, of discovering there some possible path of escape back to the outer world. Or, if that did not reveal itself, to choose some adequate hiding-place where we might possibly hold our own against an enemy who so easily outnumbered us.

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I have suspected, more than once, that his absences were due to entirely different reasons, that he was secretly conferring with someone sedulously hidden from our eyes. But I could never be sure. And even when not out on the trail, in those strange days, he showed a preference for being alone with his strange paraphernalia. I tried not to be unduly curious as he fashioned and scrubbed white his low and bier-like worktable and set his boiling-pots in place and patiently sterilized each article and utensil that entered his mysterious lodge up in the shadow of Sookinook's mountain temple. And Knutsson labored with him, quietly and contentedly and touched with an odd intentness that tended, on certain occasions, to make me feel a bit of an outsider.

As time wore on, in fact, I was more and more impressed with a vague sense of approaching climax, just as I was depressed by a sharper connviction of impending calamity. So incredible and preposterous did the whole enterprise seem, indeed, that on my last secret meeting with Ota I had taken her in my arms, and looked into her face as one looks into the face of a dear friend one fears never to see again. She was quick enough to detect that change in my manner and held my own face between her small hands and quaveringly prayed that the beauty of Sookinook might never come between us.

"There's small chance of that!" I cried out in my accumulated bitterness.

"And you will always love me?" she implored.

"Always," I said. For the name of Sookinook, at the moment, meant nothing more to me than an ever sharpening menace and peril. But about the slender body that trembled in my clasp was a human closeness and warmth, an endearing worldly frailness that made my heart ache for her. And I even nursed a suspicion that this might be the last time I should hear her voice and feel the weight of that softly rounded arm about my shoulder.

Yet Pareso himself, even in the face of his numerous makeshifts and expedients, continued to appear as cool headed and judicial as a surgeon in a completely equipped hospital, whatever his inner feelings may have been. And not wishing to be entirely outranked by Knutsson, who loomed more and more active in those preparatory rites, I tried to take the proper cue from my leader and face my appointed tasks with fortitude.

There was much of that enterprise, however, which I could not understand, just as I failed to see why I should be so sedulously scrubbed and steamed and arrayed in fresh clothing that had been over-baked like a rump-roast. This seemed doubly unnecessary when, as a final precaution, I was armed with a spear and posted at the plateau-edge to keep interfering trespassers away from the temple during the hazardous labor of releasing the lovely white Sookinook from her prison of ice. All I got was a fleeting glimpse of something ponderous being carried into the medicine-lodge, of something stark and stiff as a frozen halibut, roughly covered by a rug, being tugged from one open door to another by two panting men.

I felt very much an outsider, during that long and anxious vigil, and as the hours dragged by I fretted more and more about that bald plateau-edge overlooking the valley where something sinister crept into the light reflected from stream and wind-riffled lake. I was glad enough, in fact, when I heard Pareso calling me sharply from the doorway of the lodge. His arms were bare well above the elbows, and his face, I could see, was moist with a dewing perspiration. And there was a note of urgency in his call that clearly enough announced everything was not going so well as might have been expected.

I suppose it was the heat, more than anything else, that made me a little dizzy as I hurried in through the narrow door and closed it after me, for the air of that small chamber, quite outside its sharp odor of undistinguishable drugs, was as warm and heavy as a Swedish steam-cabinet. And what my inquiring eye rested on did not add to my quietness of spirit. I saw Knutsson, stripped to the waist, half reclining close beside and slightly above the low work-table.

His great white arm was bound, and leading from that bandage was a small rubber tube to which Pareso's control-syringe was attached. This, in turn, was linked with another tube that led to a bandage about another arm, an arm that was whiter and rounder and softer than Knutsson's. And through that narrow canal, I could see, the warm blood from one reclining figure was being steadily poured into the other reclining figure, a long and strangely relaxed figure with the tumbled crown of moist gold about its head.

"Work this plunger," I heard Pareso's voice, thin and far-off, suddenly commanding me. "Do it slowly and steadily.

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And count your strokes. When you come to a hundred, tell me."

I saw the bare-armed man move to the foot of the bier-like table, where he thrust a couple of his hot-water bags made of goat's bladders in under the heavy robe of plaited deerskin. I saw him move to the head of the bier, where he stopped low as he lifted one flaccid and dusky-fringed eyelid and stared intently at the opaque, averted pupil that seemed to be eluding his inspection.

IT WAS then, and then only, that I seemed to realize the strangeness of the miracle taking place under my eyes, the audacity of the man who was defying the ages and snatching life out of death. It became human to me, for the first time, that cold body which had slept through centuries, which had defied dissolution and change, which had remained rounded and youthful and superb while the rest of its world had grown old, while everything it had touched and known and yearned toward had fallen slowly away into the engulfing mists of the past. And as I pumped that tiny river of warm blood from one blond body into another I began to see why Pareso had brought with him this great hulk of a man who held life singing in every vein and capillary of his colossal body. I understood then why Knutsson was there. He had been carried along, I felt, as little more than a bladder of blood, a vessel full of warm and red-colored fluid to be transfused into the empty veins awaiting his gift. It was through him that a second birth was being given to the sleeping blond figure under the deer-robe.

For as I looked at the giant Swede I saw the change that had already taken place on his contented face. The earlier glow of vitality had gone from that face. It had grown paler and thinner, and, to my excited mind, even the great muscled body seemed to have dwindled and blanched. Yet deep in his pupils I could see the central fire of some persistent emotional exaltation that still burned within him. He seemed happy, absurdly happy, as the slender canal that ran from radial artery to median vein carried away its equally slender rivulet of corpuscles.

"How are you feeling?" I heard Pareso ask as he swept him with a hurried side-glance.

"I'm all right," Knutsson said through lips that had lost most of their earlier ruddiness. He complained of thirst, however, from time to time, and as Pareso resumed charge of the syringe-plunger he curtly ordered me to give Knutsson a drink.

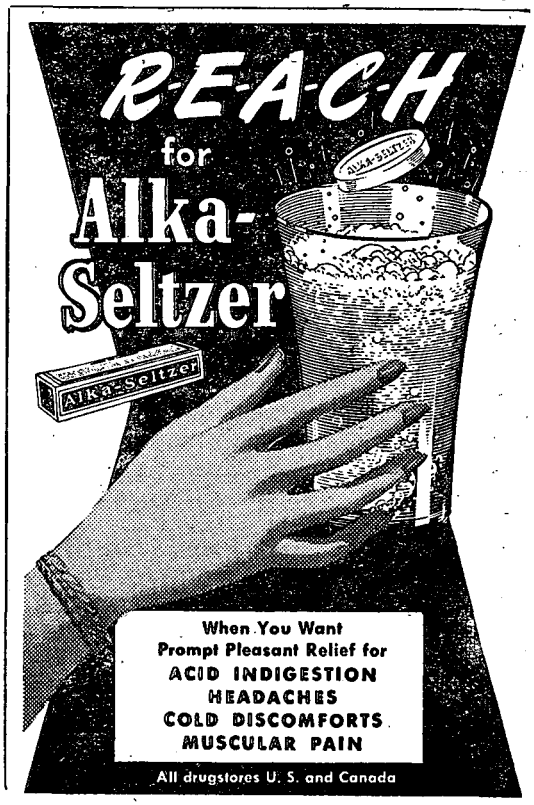
"He'll need plenty of that," announced the busy surgeon as his glance turned to a graduated dial with a fluctuating needle that I neither knew nor understood. And his voice seemed farther away than ever as he explained that this sensation of thirst in a donor was natural enough, since the rapid absorption of fluid from the tissues into the blood set up a compensatory call for water at such a time. But something about Knutsson's face, for all its slumberous look of content, began to disturb me.

"What are *you* afraid of?" Pareso suddenly and almost angrily demanded of me. And I could feel his quick look of scorn, like a whip in my face.

"I don't like the way he looks," I said with a head-nod toward the drooping blond giant.

"I guess he's happier than you are," snapped Pareso, though I noticed that he was working the little plunger much more slowly.

"He's going to faint," I cried as I caught a tremulous movement of the blond eyelids at the same time that the body



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slumped lower in its supporting hammock of rawhide.

"Take this," called Pareso as he summoned me back to the transfusion instrument. What he did, after that, I could not see, for my back was turned to him.

"Is she coming to life?" I heard Knutsson's oddly thinned and infinitely languid voice ask out of the silence.

"Not yet," was the other's abstracted reply. "But this fire has got to burn," he panted. "It's got to burn now or never!"

I could see the frown deepen on his sweat-covered face and a new look of anxiety in his eyes as he glanced at the crumpled-up Knutsson, who looked no more like the living than did the relaxed white figure on the bier.

"You've killed him!" I gasped.

"Shut up!" cried Pareso, pushing me roughly aside. But he called out to me, sharply, to give a hand in lifting the inert Knutsson to the far side of the lodge, where he was covered with a goat-skin blanket and a little *cognac* was poured down his throat.

Then Pareso, with a light in his eye not at all to my liking, caught me by the arm and dragged me to the head of the bier.

"Do you want to see her live?" he demanded, turning the sleeping face about with a roughness that I resented.

I looked down into that sleeping face, with its shadowing crown of gold, with its closed eyes in which so many mysteries reposed, with the pathetically curving line of the lips that seemed to be pleading for life again. And the queenly beauty of it warmed my blood as wine might, warmed my blood and gave me a touch of the same reckless courage that had served to turn the sleeping Knutsson from a lusty and care-free animal into a martyr forgetful of sense and self.

"D'you want her brought back?" repeated Pareso, knuckling the relaxed jaw open and making sure the tongue had not fallen back into the throat.

"Can it be done?" I cried as I touched the coils of massed hair as bright as gold itself.

"If you'll do what Knutsson has done," was Pareso's answer.

I was in his hands, I knew, even before I agreed to that oblique demand. Our safety, I remembered, depended on that venture. Our very lives, in a way, hung on its outcome. Unless breath came to that unnaturally quiet body there was every promise that it would be quickly enough taken out of our own.

"I'm willing," I announced.

I had braced myself for pain. But I experienced none. I was merely a little lightheaded from the heat of the chamber and the thought, as bracing as old brandy, that I was carrying animation to inanimate glory, that I was contributing to this miracle of bringing life out of death, that I was helping to crown the imperishable with our dubious gift of the perishable.

I had scant knowledge of what Pareso was doing. But I could hear his gasps of effort, his low cry of hope, his louder groan of defeat. I could hear a sort of frantic prayer burst from his lips as he set to work again. More than ever his voice sounded thin and far-away, for I was weak, I imagine, from overtried nerves and loss of blood.

How long he worked over that pallid blond figure I had no means of knowing. Whether it was a matter of minutes or hours I could never tell, for I lost all track of time in a sudden great weariness. I must have fainted away. When I opened my eyes again Pareso's face seemed to float before me in a mist and his voice seemed to come from a great distance.

"Is she alive?" I asked in a quavering whisper, watching him as he stooped over the bier-like table.

"She's alive," he wearily retorted. But there was no triumph in his voice. Instead of exultation it merely held an abstracted sort of weariness. And when he turned back to the deerskin draped figure, after pouring warm goat's milk with a dash of *cognac* down my throat, I noticed two things.

One was a great tress of hair lying vivid gold on the lodge floor, a tress obviously cut from the impassive head on the bier. The other was the fact that this head was closely wrapped in bandages, like a turban. But I gave it little thought, at the time, as my attention was upon the final pronouncement of Pareso—"She'll live."

CHAPTER VIII

THE PILGRIM SOUL

HOW LONG I lay there, in my later sleep of exhaustion, has been always beyond my power to determine. But it was daylight when I woke again. The air in the lodge was both fresher and cooler than I last remembered it, and I could see Pareso still sitting beside the bier-like table draped with its robes of deerskin, sitting with a protruding white

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wrist resting in his hand. It wasn't until I blinked at him a second time that I discovered he was reading the pulse that throbbed in the satin-white forearm beside him. It even startled me to see a faint heave and twist of the tall body and to hear from the dreaming lips a low sound that could be called neither a moan nor a sigh.

Pareso was stooping over her, the next moment, apparently pouring a little of his warm goat's milk with *cognac* down the unwilling throat. There was a vague gentleness on his sharp-lined face as he stooped there, studying the face which I could not see. And he sighed, almost contentedly, as he resumed his seat, with his chin resting on his hand and his elbow in turn resting on his knee. He looked old and worn and inexpressibly tired, with blue-gray shadows under his ruminative deep-set eyes. I was startled, the next moment, to see a paroxysm pass through the sleeping figure and a cry break from the half-conscious lips.

And as I lay there, with the sound of that strange voice still in my ears, I fell to wondering where the owner of that voice had come from and what she carried back with her. Would she be a child again, with only the impulses and the incapacities of the newly born? Would memory still live in that awakened brain? And if the golden body once more housed a soul, where had that soul come from? Would that long sleep, when she had fully awakened, he burdened with the weight of its centuries? Or, since sleep is sleep and since the unconscious mind can bear no record of time, might it not be merely like waking from a night's slumber to the light of another morning?

Pareso himself must have been pondering over somewhat the same questions, for as he gazed down at the bandaged blond head I could see a puzzled look on his tired face, a look of uncertainty touched with mounting disquiet. It was as his glance slued about, to study the still sleeping Knutsson, that he saw I was awake.

He came over and stood beside me, fraternally, with one hand on my shoulder.

"You're feeling better?" he said after a quick look into my face. His voice was weak but kindly. And never did I seem as close to him as I did at that moment, while he stood there, in an aura of loneliness, reaching out a forlorn hand, apparently, for a familiar human contact.

I gazed at the woman who lay there before us in such an unnatural calm. And still again it seemed incredible that the machinery of life in the body under the deerskin robe should be making that robe rise and fall with her regular breathing.

"Will she live?" I asked in a whisper.

"She's *got* to live," said Pareso with a new, emotional note in his voice. "And she will. She will, now, with our help. And you'll be doing your part if you'll keep watch here, while I get a little rest. Can you?"

I assured him that I could.

"Call me if anything happens. And keep an eye on Karl. I had to drain the poor beggar a little drier than I intended." A ghost of a smile played about Pareso's lips as he gazed down at me. "And I had to take more out of *you* than I wanted to."

I realized that fact when, after Pareso was off on his much-needed sleep, I moved dizzily across the lodge to get a drink for Knutsson, who grunted and promptly lapsed off into slumber again. I was glad enough to sink back into the seat beside the silent figure and rest there until my pulse grew quieter and the ringing went from my ears.

Then, swayed by a slowly accumulating curiosity, I found the energy to lean forward and study the shadowy face under its turban of white. I could see the violet shadows below the thickly planted lashes that swept the ivory-smooth cheek, the rhythm of a pulse in the softly rounded neck, the delicate stippling of small lines that marked the curved lips slightly puckered with the relaxation of weariness. Then I leaned closer, staring once more down at the dusk-lidded eyes that had been shut for so long from the light of heaven. I was idly enough speculating as to the color of those eyes, as to their expression when they opened, as to the loneliness that would surely lie there when they looked out on their new surroundings, when the breast so close under my shoulder heaved with a deeper breath that was almost a sigh and the heavy lids so near my stooping face slowly opened.

They opened as doors open, revealing a blue sky beyond. For as I stared down into those unfocused mild eyes I saw the bluest blue I had ever looked into, the blue of the turquoise without its tinge of violet, the blue of the corn-flower intensified into a burning azure, the blue of cyanin softened with a trace of gentian.

They seemed too intent on their struggle with the new-found mystery of light, at first, to see either me or my sudden movement of astonishment. They were absorbed,

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apparently, in the mere sensation of vision, in the uncomprehended miracle of light, shadow and movement making itself known. It was not until their glance grew intelligent and focused and controlled that they turned slowly and studied my face.

I could see the unuttered question in their depths, the mild and brooding wonder at the core of each pool of azure. For those eyes seemed to be asking, as plain as words could have put it, "Who are you?"

AND I, in my predicament, found no answer ready for that question. I could only fall to stroking the white hand that lay outside the deer-robe, stroking it slowly and reassuringly, as I have seen a mother stroke a hurt child, or a rider stroke a nervous horse. I even felt slightly abashed before the gaze of those eyes, as though they held a reproach against which I had no defense.

Yet when I fell to stroking the white hand again those eyes of burning blue were no longer on my face, but were staring up with a more meditative light in their depths, with a faint frown of introspection furrowing the golden brows above them. And I knew as I looked at them that they were now asking a second question, a question which, had it been put into words, could only have been, "Who am I?"

The problem seemed too deep for their probing, for after a time they closed again, slowly and wearily, and I knew by the quieted breathing of the broad bosom that the half-awakened spirit had once more slipped off into slumber.

The time and the care it took to nurse that hesitating spirit back to its full vigor is a matter I need not here recount in detail. But there were many factors, I found, to Pareso's advantage. Not the least important of these, I feel, was the superb animal strength of that heroically molded figure. And another, I'm equally sure, was that clean and tonic mountain air which held none of the corruption of earth's more crowded places. And still another, of course, was the skill and knowledge and patience of that strange man who seemed the repository of wisdom of the ages tangled up with the naïvete of a child.

Yet from then on it was anything but plain sailing. For newer troubles were brewing beyond our lodge doors. And the first intimation of these came with the appearance of a body of spear-men headed by Attapok himself, with Pennekuk at his side. The latter two worthies, I observed, stood with our fire-sticks in their hands. And when the old chief demanded that Pareso present himself to their view they both, obviously acting in accordance with a prearranged plan, promptly pointed the glistening revolvers at Pareso's body and pulled the triggers.

Those Fire-Sticks, of course, were empty, and nothing much resulted from the movement. On Attapok's old face, indeed, I could see both wonder and disappointment at the discovery that the Thunder-Bird could not be thus magically struck down by his own instrument of death. In the excitement, however, I had sense enough to wrest the firearm from the old chief's fingers and drop back through the lodge door, where I promptly filled the empty chambers.

I was none to quick in my movements, for as I stepped out into the open again I saw one of the spear-men, larger and more malignant-faced than the others, break from the line and with his ugly long-headed lance balanced for striking, charge straight for the helpless Pareso.

I shot from the half-arm, having no time for more delibrate aim. But my bullet caught him in the leg and sent him sprawling and tumbling down the icy slope, where he lay in a heap.

His unlooked-for fall, I could see, had thrown the fear of God into that wavering line. It held them where they stood and caused even the scowling Pennekuk to retreat to the back of that sheltering group, where, I noticed, he secreted the remaining revolver beneath the fur of his parka. But that brief armistice gave Pareso a chance to harangue the huddled group and explain that his power had not failed him, that mastery over life and death still remained in his hands, and that Sookinook, the Woman Who Couldn't Die, was indeed a living and happy being, warm with the breath of life.

"That's a lie!" cried Pennekuk from his rear line of warriors. "For if she lived she would step forth and confront us."

But Pareso's patience did not give way.

"The new soul that reposes in her body, my friends," he patiently explained, "has traveled a great distance and is still weary, even as the wings of a bird which has flown night and day for a moon are weary. But it is meet that you should now look upon her with your own eyes and behold her in her living beauty."

So at an appointed hour, when the medicine-lodge had been put to rights, old

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Attapok and his under-chiefs were permitted to file solemnly in through the door, one by one, circle about the long couch draped with deerskin, and look upon the face of their living Sookinook. That face, slightly flushed with fever, now held a beauty that could easily be accepted as unearthly. And as the tribesmen one by one touched the warm body, to make sure of its reality, a childlike look of awe came into the doubting eyes and a new air of reverence crept into their movements.

TWO WEEKS later, when Pareso concluded that the more equable valley air would be better for his patient, a litter with long carrying-poles was carefully constructed and with much ceremonial the new queen was transported to the concourse temple that had been made ready for her. Yet she knew little of either this change or of the homage that was being bestowed upon her, for, even after her fever had passed away, she remained in the clutch of a sustained deep lassitude that left her satisfied to sleep and waken for nourishment and then fall asleep again.

"That's only the clock winding up again," explained Pareso when I spoke to him on this matter. "The anabolic processes, under such conditions, must be slow at first. Even the Pskof peasants of Russia who practise partial hibernation take considerable time to get back to normal, I've noticed."

"But there's the other side of the problem," I pointed out. "Supposing, for example, you've brought back the empty shell of a body, without a mind inside it?"

Pareso laughed at my fears.

"You needn't worry about that. It's there, as surely as the endosperm is in the wheat-berry. And what's more, I've had actual evidence of it. Twice, now, Thera has spoken to me."

"Thera?" I echoed.

"This woman's name is Thera," he reminded me, "and we may as well get used to it. She's Thera, the daughter of Olaf, of Hordoland!"

It was easy enough to say. But the question of that head-bandage still bothered me. And I kept thinking of the blond woman in the wilderness chalet, the silent woman I had seen through the mists of fever. I remembered the ghostly figure I had seemed to see, still later, amid the final delirium of our journey. And I remembered Pareso's allusion to the false Minerva once known as Phya.

But I tried to dismiss those thoughts. I wanted to believe in Thera. I had a craving to accept her, even as that lost tribe was accepting her, even as the rapt-eyed Ota had accepted her. For the sister of Pennekuk, because of her earlier association with the Temple of the Golden Eagle, had already been set apart as a sort of priestess and attendant to the new goddess.

A movable throne-seat, as comfortable as a Bath-chair when cushioned and draped with furs, had been solemnly constructed for Thera. In this, day by day, she was carried out to the dais in front of the temple, where the people, her people, left at the feet of their miraculously reclaimed Sookinook increasingly generous gifts of metal and meat and milk and raiment. And as that stately stranger gathered strength there in the tonic northern air a richer coloring came into the tired eyes of brooding blue.

Hour by hour she would sit watching the clouds that drifted across the sky, watching the deepening gold of the afternoon sun, watching the leaves in the wind, watching the banners and streamers of the Northern Lights when they showed green and opal and orange beyond the snowy mountains with the wine-glow still lingering on their topmost crests. In her face, at such times, I could detect neither happiness nor unhappiness. She seemed more lost in a formless and languid abstraction of spirit from which, now and then, she would emerge to the extent of uttering a sigh that did not altogether seem a sigh of regret.

But one pearl-misted afternoon when Ota was quietly combing the heavy mass of wheat-colored hair, from which the bandaging turban had finally been removed, a look of perplexity came into the meditative eyes and the rose-petal lips spoke a quiet word or two.

What she said, of course, neither Ota nor I could decipher. Nor could we by sign or movement prompt her to speak again. But even that momentary emergence from the mists about her left me strangely stirred, strangely anxious for some further bridging of the abyss. And from that day forward the look of world-strangeness seemed to fade slowly from those eyes of luminous blue. As this woman called Thera became more conscious of her surroundings, of the sun that warmed her, of the mountains that

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shadowed her, of us who tended her, her face grew animated with a new responsiveness that seemed to bring her closer to those around her.

And all of us, after our own fashion, grew fond of her. That was an end from which there seemed to be no escape. It was inevitable and preordained, for beauty demands its earthly tribute of adoration. Knutsson's dumb worship, naturally, was plainer to the eye than was Pareso's half-speculative devotion touched with the persistent intellectual curiosity of the scientist. Through all of Ota's quick-handed service ran a thread of awe, a primitive strain of sheer idolatry, as though she were the handmaiden not of a mortal woman but of the true Daughter of the Sun come down to earth. And as for myself, I came to love that queenly stranger as one loves pure beauty made precious by some complicating gift of mystery. She might never stand as companionably close to me, I felt, as did the quick-eyed and warm-hearted Ota, Ota who hungered for human friendship and accepted my kisses with little cooing laughs of delight. But Thera was different. She was something above and beyond us. She seemed, in her superbness, to be a myth made manifest, to be trailing clouds of glory that could not be lightly stirred and could never be completely penetrated.

That softer interlude, however, was not destined to be of long duration. For on the midnight after Thera's first unaided journey across the concourse and back I was awakened by a noise not far from our new sleeping-quarters in the temple-wing. I felt, in my first moment of alarm, that it might be some danger threatening Ota, who now slept in a small chamber next to the quarters which Knutsson had surrendered to Thera. When I forced open the door made of buckskin laced over a frame of spruce-wood, however, I found the girl safe in bed. So, arming myself with the remaining revolver and Pareso's flashlight, I stood waiting in the darkness, oppressed by a nameless sense of peril.

I REMEMBERED, as I waited there, that vague but persistent sense of being spied on, of being secretly watched, which had oppressed me from my earliest days in the land of Ota. And when a betraying small noise repeated itself from the other side of the temple I was in no mood for hesitation. I thrust Ota behind me and advanced until I was persuaded we stood practically at the source of that noise. And when an unmistakably human grunt sounded directly in front of me I switched on the light. As I did so I found myself staring into the startled face of Pennekuk, who reached for his hunting-knife at the same moment that I reached for my revolver. In the temple corner beside him lay Pareso's buckskin belt, with the cartridge-pouch attached to it slit wide open.

Had it not been for Ota, I think I should have shot that intruder where he stood. But I heard the small cry of the girl close behind me and felt the clasp of her fingers on my arm. So instead of putting a bullet through the embattled Pennekuk, I held him flattened against the wall where he gabbled in his unknown tongue to the equally garrulous Ota. I could see her open his hand and from it take three or four of Pareso's precious cartridges.

"What does all this mean?" I demanded.

"He says," explained Ota, "that it was the wish of Attapok."

"What is the wish of Attapok?"

"Attapok," was Ota's answer, "desired the smoke-eggs that fitted into the throat of the Fire-Stick, that he might see for all time if the Thunder-Bird, and the big Fire-God, and also if Sookinook herself, were truly spirits of the air. And even more especially you, O Fire-Stone. It was his intention to make that test."

"What test?" I demanded.

"The test that is mightier than much talk," explained the girl. "For if you were true spirits, he contends, the Fire-Stick would be harmless against you. If you were but men and women, however, you would die as did Olaka's ewe-sheep on the day when you first stood before the Temple of the Golden Eagle."

So completely disturbing was this message that I released my hold on the now silent Pennekuk.

"And would you have allowed this Fire-Stick to bark at your Sookinook?" I demanded.

"What evil, O Fire-Stone, could befall her, being truly one of the air-spirits?"

"We'll talk about that later," I countered, knowing how thin was the ice on which we stood. "As for Pennekuk here, I see where we'll have much to say to each other. But before that takes place tell your brother I have no wish to work him evil."

"Pennekuk," I heard the girl say in the

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darkness. But there was no answer to her call.

"Where is he?" I asked, wheeling my flashlight about in the darkness.

"He is gone!" said the tremulous small voice at my side. "And O Fire-Stone, something tells me this will spell evil for you and the Thunder-Bird, for I know the thoughts in Pennekuk's heart are black thoughts and his words are unholy words."

"What," I asked, "were his words?"

"He said, O Fire-Stone," was the whispered reply, "that you and the new Fire-God and the Thunder-Bird are no more holy than three old he-goats who might wander down from across the outer hills!"

WHILE to the casual eye, the life of our valley tribe went on as before, I was not altogether unconscious of some subtle and disturbing change in the spirit of the people about me. I couldn't rid myself of a sense of subterranean activities, of secret distrusts and conspiracies being woven beyond our narrow circle of knowledge. Daily, at dawn and dusk, the drums sounded and the people assembled in the smooth-trodden concourse of the rites that were expected of them. Morning by morning the men went forth in their quest of fur and food, of metal and wood; and day by day the women gathered their wild-fowl eggs and cured hides and smoked fish and ground meal from dried roots and the berries of what seemed a stunted variety of wild rice. The children played about the lanes of the village and the old men made animal-traps and hunting-weapons and in the long evenings Koomiak, the tribal poet who had only one eye and a face as wrinkled as a winter apple, intoned his sagas to the music of a keelon, telling how the old days were the days of heroes and high adventure.

As for Pareso himself, he seemed to be off on never-ending reconnaissances about the outer fringe of the valley. He claimed to be looking for a more adequate supply of copper, being anxious to teach the tribe an easier method of tempering and hardening their tools, but a proper mixture of that latter metal with their native gold.

Yet all the while, I know, he was making a careful appraisal of that little kingdom's wealth in gold and oil at the same time that he was carrying on a guarded search for some gateway to the outer world. The time came, in fact, where he preferred to have Knutsson go along with him on these furtive excursions, and day after day, the two strange figures would lose themselves in those remoter canyons and slopes over which still hung the taboo of the tribesmen about us.

To me, accordingly, fell the task of teaching Thera the first rudiments of the English language, which she learned slowly and with the studious intentness of a child. By this time, too, she had learned the use of the needle and she was happiest, I think, when seated in the thin northern sunlight fashioning some garment for her own wear.

She was especially proud of a sort of flowing parka or ahtee which she made for herself, a parka fashioned out of the finest of white-fox skins. But the thing that most puzzled me was her emergence from weakness to strength. Her color deepened with sun and open air, but never once did her skin lose its magnolialike creaminess. A deeper luster, too, seemed to creep into the gold of her hair, and Ota showed me, one day, how the combed-out strands could be made to swing a full hand's width below the knee.

Another thing that amazed me, once health returned to that superb and supple body of Thera's, was her sheer physical strength. She looked like a goddess. There was no doubt of that. But, in another way, she seemed very much a woman. She knew that she was beautiful; and she had a woman's instinctive knowledge of the power of beauty.

I can still remember how, at the end of one of our lessons, she watched a wild goose fly overhead, watched it as it crossed the valley and disappeared from sight.

"Tell me," she said in her halting English, "where did I come from?"

That sudden question sent a needling of apprehension through my body. How much she should be told was not easy to determine.

"From across the sea," I finally answered.

"It must have been long ago," she mused aloud.

"Yes," I agreed. "It was long ago."

I don't know how sincere she was in that forgetfulness. But she did not seem given to duplicity. Her attitude toward the tribe that surrounded her, for example, was frankly one of indifference. She accepted their tribute, in her own

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detached and smiling way, but there were times when she went through the essential temple-rites as absently as a vagabond-actor going through a too familiar rôle. One day, after a sort of fête-day ceremonial, I heard her murmur, "These tow-headed sheep, they tire me!"

But one much more memorable day, when we were alone in the quietness of concourse temple, Thera, after pacing idly back and forth, turned and studied me with her eyes of burning blue.

"Why are you afraid of me, David?"

I could feel the color, before that candid gaze, come and go in my face.

"I am not afraid of you," I protested.

"But you hold me at arm's length, like these fish-eating Eskimos," she complained in her groping new tongue. "You don't look on me as though I were quite human."

"I respect you," I began. "I—"

But she cut me short, with a low and human enough rill of laughter.

"No woman," she said with a body-movement of *ennui*, "cares to be looked up to like a statue in a niche. I'm not—not entirely made of marble. I'm alive. And I'm lonely."

"I'll always be your friend," was my respectful enough answer to that.

But she sighed as she studied my face.

"I want more than friendship," she said as she sank down on her fur-draped throne-seat. "And we live but once."

That chilled me, knowing what I knew, like a breath from a tomb.

"There are those who live more than once," I found courage to remind her.

She turned back to me, at that, with her ruminative blue eyes on my face.

"But there are those who have never lived," she contended. I could see her body heave with a deeper sigh. "Come closer to me," she quietly commanded.

I went, obediently enough. But I was no longer thinking of tombs. And my heart beat faster as she reached out a hand and put it on my shoulder.

"Am I so ugly?" she demanded with her wintry smile.

"You are beautiful," I proclaimed, my heart pounding my ribs. But at the moment, I wasn't thinking of Thera the daughter of Olaf. I was thinking more of Olga Shashkov, the shadowed woman of silence, the woman of dark and unknown destinies.

"I am lonely," she murmured as she thrust her fingers through the hair of my drooping head.

She was really and mysteriously beautiful. And I was merely a mortal. And the outcome of everything about me, at the moment, seemed as uncertain and phantasmal as life on the eve of a great battle.

"I would die for you," I cried, with a quaver of abandonment.

But still again I saw the wintry smile on her face.

"No, David, no that," she demurred. "I'd rather you lived for me. Couldn't you—couldn't you learn to love me a little?"

"I do love you," I whispered.

"Then kiss me," was her answering whisper as she relaxed in my arms, with her eyes closed.

All memory of time and place went out, like a lamp. I forgot the soft-voiced Ota. I forgot Pareso and Knutsson. I forgot temples and tribes and the accumulating perils that surrounded a band of travel-worn exiles. I merely remembered that an incomparably beautiful woman had asked me to kiss her.

And I emerged from that engulfing trance only at the sound of Ota's voice, calling out my name.

I had to steady myself against the chair-arm, as I turned and looked at the slender-bodied girl. There was neither anger nor reproof in her eyes. Her face, however, was colorless. And her hands also shook a little, I observed, as she held out a comb, made of beaten gold, to the silent Thera.

"This," she quietly affirmed, "has just been fashioned and sent to you by Karl Knutsson."

"By Karl?" I echoed, astonished by the harshness of my own voice.

"By him you speak of as Karl Knutsson," was Ota's impassive reply.

CHAPTER IX

PACING THE CAGE

IT MUST have been about this time that I noticed a marked change in both my fellow-adventurers. Pareso, for some reason, became daily more morose and self-immured. The big-bodied Knutsson, on the other hand, lost his earlier touch of sullenness. He no longer complained, but seemed to walk in a fog of abstraction. His step grew lighter and he became happier in spirit. And rarely did his old restlessness break through that Indian summer of resignation.

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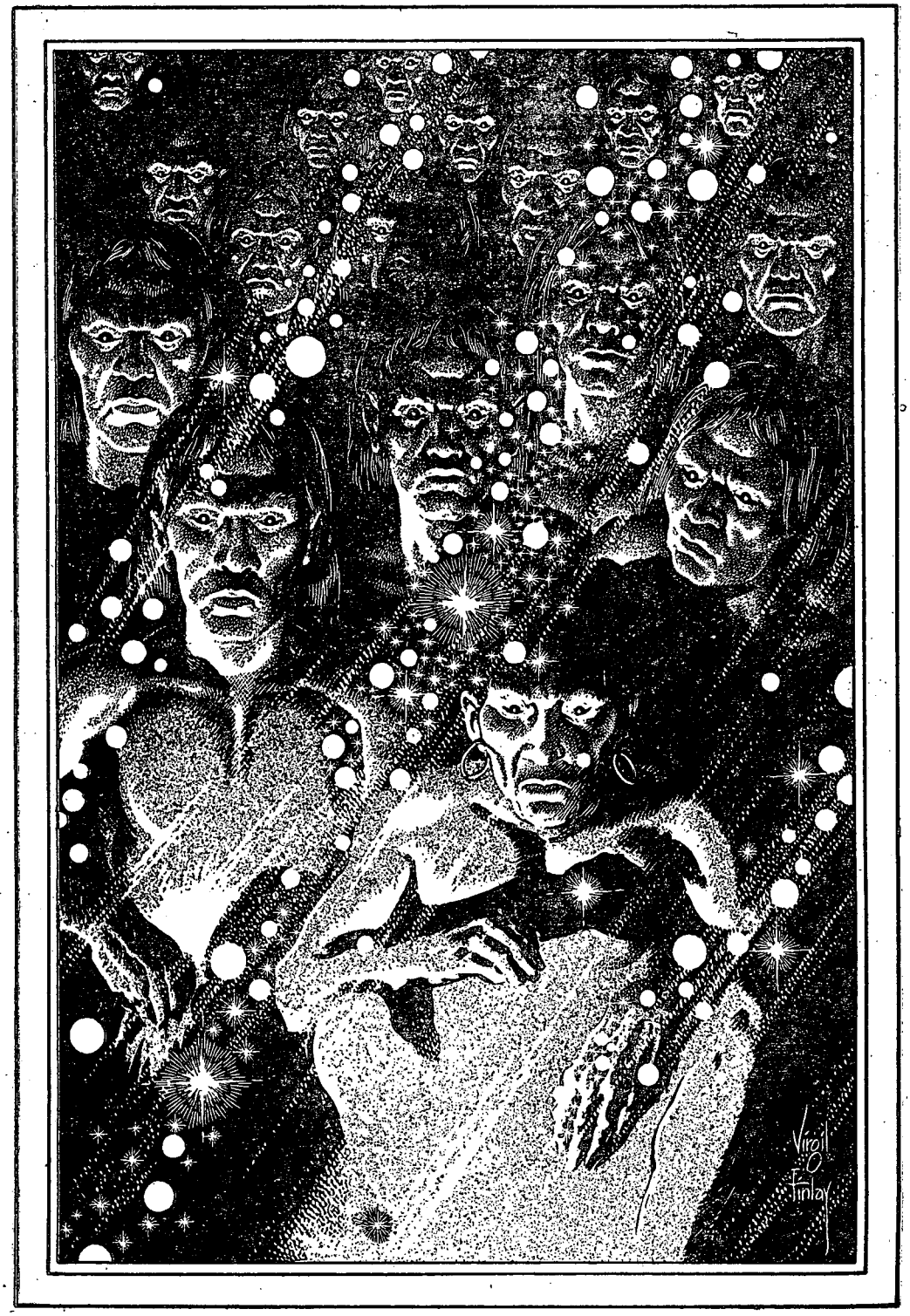

When the darkened concourse began to fill with crowding shadows. . . .

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This puzzled me, from time to time. Then, quite by accident, I stumbled on the key that had unlocked the door of change.

I discovered it one moonlit night when, looking for Ota, I went to the lake called the Pool of Laughing Shores, where the wind-riffled water sang on the gravelly banks beneath a gentle sloping grove of white birches. This grove seemed ghostly by night, with the slender white boles standing like a thousand sentinels in the dappled light. But in a more open space toward the center of the grove I caught the movement of a figure and as promptly accepted it as Ota's. I hesitated, however, wondering how I could creep up on the musing girl without startling her into flight.

Then I moved still closer through the mottled moonlight. And a moment later I discovered my mistake. For the figure of the woman with the averted face was not Ota's. It was Thera's; and she was not alone. Before her, I could now see, kneeled Knutsson. His arms were clasped about her knees and his face was upturned to hers. There was, too, something regal in her posture as she sat on a lichened rock with her right arm swung forward and her fingers thrust deep in the tawny mass of that huge Swede's hair. She seemed to be studying his upturned face, studying it with a prolonged and wistful stare that ended in a sigh.

"Perhaps you are right," I could hear her say. "I too have felt that way. There seems so little left now, except what we can give ourselves."

"We have no right to fight against it," responded the unexpectedly softened voice of the man beside her.

"It is not that, Karl," was the woman's quiet answer. "But what is there to matter, now? What is there to matter in all the wide world? Everything has gone. I am so alone, so alone that my blood grows cold, when I think of it, in the night."

"Then come with me," cried Knutsson, with a tighter clasp of the stooping blond body.

"But where could we go?" asked Thera, taking a deeper breath.

"I'll find a way out," he protested.

"And betray Carlo?" she asked.

"We have our own right to live."

"Carlo," she reminded him, "might say the same."

"Then you still think of that man?" challenged Knutsson, a new note of jealousy in his voice.

"Not as I think of you," she reminded him. "But he is my master. And without him, I would not be here."

Knutsson stood [illegible] in the mottled shadow and splashes of silver. He looked Titanic and rugged and rude, in his partly furred parka. Yet he seemed kinglier, in his Gothlike hugeness, than I had thought him capable of looking. And, reluctant as I was to admit it, there appeared something almost noble in his bearing.

"But what is life in a Polar wilderness like this?" he demanded. "What can you get out of being a human totem-pole to a tribe of white-headed Indians who'll murder us all in our sleep when the time is ripe? And why should we go on like this, week by week and month by month, when there's a different world calling for us, a world that isn't a world of fish-eating savages, but—"

"Perhaps I belong more to that world of fish-eating savages," interrupted the woman with the regal crown of gold that was glimmering so warmly in the moonlight.

"You belong to me," cried the tawny giant confronting her. "And once we're back in our right world we can be happy."

"But it's a long way back to our right world," the mournful-voiced woman reminded him.

Knutsson, apparently, did not understand her as she meant to be understood.

"It's worth the try," he averred.

I could not hear everything he said, but I knew he was telling her of lands where it was always summer, lands where snow and ice were unknown and birds sang and flowers were for ever in bloom. And as I sat in the mist-filtered northern moonlight I thought of Thera on a copra-schooner, beating about palm-fringed islands lashed by the Trades, creeping into beryl-watered harbors with rusty wharf-sheds, with the swart bare-chested Knutsson at the wheel and her own regal body, browned by wind and sun, scantily clad in faded dungaree, probably patched and none too clean, and with a tow-headed child or two clinging to her skirts.

I could see the gold faded from her heavily coiled hair and the queenliness gone from the superb blond body with the skin that was now as smooth as magnolia petals and the old ineffable composure vanishing from the watching face as she waited beside a malodorous

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string-piece for her mate to come back to her, to come back from the trader's island, rolling a little as he walked and singing the songs I had once heard him singing in a city on the St. Lawrence. I could see him, in my mind's eye, obese and rubicund and with a fresh bottle of gin under his arm, rolling back to his ship, and to his woman, who had once been the daughter of mystery.

I COULD picture it all, but I could not conceive of it as possible. It seemed as incongruous as the thought of a goddess out of Scandinavian mythology stepping into a suburban trolley-car.

Yet Thera, I was reminded as I once more heard her voice through the quiet moonlight, was still a woman warm with the currents that swayed other women.

"We may not be right, Karl," she was saying, "but I feel I have much lost time to make up for, that I have been cheated, in some way. That's about all I can remember."

"All I want to remember," contended Knutsson, "is that I'm here beside you and that you are beautiful."

She seemed to catch her breath, at that, for she turned her head slowly toward him again and a dreamier intonation came into her coice.

"Am I beautiful?" she asked. "Am I, to you, truly beautiful?" And those words had a familiar ring to them.

"You are so beautiful," answered the man I had reason to regard as merely a drunken sailor with the soul of an animal, "you are so beautiful that my heart aches."

I could see Thera place her hands on his shoulders and study the face so close to her, as she had done with my own. I could even see her eyes close and her body relax as it swayed a trifle toward him in the moonlight.

"Then kiss me," she commanded. Yet she spoke so softly that it seemed little more than a whisper. And then I could see the two misty silhouettes move and meet in the dusk. I could see the two heroically proportioned and motionless bodies cling together and the two heads of gold bend so close that they met and merged and made one mass of misty tawniness in the pale light between the ghostly birch boles . . .

I turned and crept away, indeterminately sick at heart, depressed by a feeling of betrayal, of being cheated and deceived by those who stood closest about me. I felt friendless and alone in a world that seemed little more than a walking nightmare.

I tried to persuade myself that Knutsson was a deserter, a renegade to the cause he had sworn to support. But, try as I might, I could not write him down as an utterly bad man. He was, after all, merely human, merely hungry for his earthly share of happiness.

But there were others, I remembered, who had an equal right to happiness. And as I crept forward through the spectral northern half-light and met Ota at the edge of the sleeping village I knew a forlorn sense of companionship in feeling the loyal pressure of her fingers as her hand sought and found mine in the silence.

"You are cold," she whispered.

"Where is Pareso?" I asked, trying to steady my voice.

"He sleeps," was the answer. "And, oh, Fire-Stone, it has been lonely here without you!"

It seemed an old cry, a familiar cry, the reminiscent cry of all the world against the desolation of life. And with an impulse of compassion, of compassion for her and for myself, I took the soft-bodied girl in my arms and held her close. And that too, I remembered, seemed tragically like life as a whole, for some darker ghost at my side whispered that this was not life's best love that lay in the hollow of my hand, but merely the second-best that the passing moments had offered.

"Your heart," complained Ota in a voice like a sleepy bird's, "is as cold as your hands."

"There is a thing or two," I said as my eye fell on Thera's empty throne-seat, "that troubles my mind." And I sat silent a moment. "Ota," I finally resumed, "they say there's no gateway between this valley home of yours and the world that lies beyond it. But if, somehow, somewhere, a door should be found through which we could escape to that outer world, would you come with me?"

I could feel the small breast heave with a great breath.

"Wherever you went," she murmured, "there too I would go. Even though it led me through snow and loneliness and made me walk with hunger and cold, even though it took me for ever from my home and carried me far from the topicks of my own people!"

I was not without a fragile but fortifying feeling, as she spoke, that other men

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beside Knutsson could snatch at their fleeting moments of glory.

"Listen," I said as I glanced up at the misty white mountain-fangs that bit like hungry teeth into the duky flank of the horizon. "If we can find a pass through those mountains, if we can discover a trail somewhere between those peaks, will you come with me?"

"As I have said," replied Ota, "I will go with you. But it is a path of danger, and for even you, O Fire-Stone, it would be hard to find."

I stopped short at that speech of hers.

"Have you, at any time, in any way, ever heard of such a path?"

"It seems misty, like a dream," was the girl's retarded reply. "But it was old Koomiak who in my childhood once talked of such a gateway. He was punished for it and told to sing of more sensible things. And the very old women, at night, used to tell of one Opalotok, a great hunter, who defied the devils of the Bad Lands and crossed the upper peaks and came back in a year's time with seven black scalps on his belt and a load of walrus-ivory on his shoulders."

Still again I sat silent, digesting the words that might mean so little or so much.

"And are such things still talked about, in secret?"

"It is against the law of our people to talk of such things," explained Ota. "But where the fire lies deep it is not easy to smother the smoke."

"Then could you quietly, by going back to these old women, the wise old women who remember so many things the rest of the world forgets, find out for me any hearsay as to that secret gateway? Any rumor or crumb of truth about it?"

Slowly the girl shook her head.

"It would lead only into danger," she averred.

"But not counting that," I persisted, "would you do it for me?"

"I would do anything for you, O Fire-Stone," she said as her glance met mine in the moonlight.

"You could do nothing," I said with one hand on her tawny head, "that would leave me more in your debt, or help me more in my trouble!"

Yet as we stood up side by side and she wavered and melted into my arms, the memory of how two other figures had melted and merged together in the same moonlight pushed slowly through my breast, a spear-head of pain that seemed reaching for my heart.

IT WAS Kiooka, sometimes known to the tribe as the Grumbling Giant, who shortly after that thrust himself so unlooked for into the tenor of our plans. He opened his mouth of fire and spake, and shocked us into momentary silence.

Now Kiooka, I must explain, was a quiescent volcanic peak that towered a trifle more sullen-faced than his brothers among the cordilleras of the Alaskan peninsula. In the old days, according to the traditions of the tribe, it had vomited fire and smoke without cessation. But the snows, of late, had piled closer about its inactive crater and the glacial-ice had thickened along its side. So when the Grumbling Giant spoke again out of his long silence the unrest of Kiooka was accepted as a sign that the higher gods were none too well pleased with the inhabitants of the valley under his shadow.

It seemed natural enough, accordingly, when the Grumbling Giant stirred in his sleep that old Attapok should make his appearance at the temple door. He came both plumed with a new importance and armed with the suggestion that special ceremonies be enacted to appease the evil ones responsible for the disturbance. But Pareso, who had other plans afoot, showed little enthusiasm for any such rites.

"I'm sick of this trumpery," he announced when the furtive-eyed Attapok had taken his grumbling departure. And Pareso, as he stared about at the barricading peaks and walls that held him a prisoner, made me think of a bald-headed eagle I'd seen years before, an old eagle with a broken wing, caged away from the skies he could only watch with an embittered eye. The air was gray with the smoke and ash from Kiooka, very much as I've seen more southerly hills gray with the smoke of distant forest-fires. This grayness gave a touch of unreality to the things about us. Even the sun had taken on a more somber tinge of copper, just as the modified light that filtered down from it seemed to carry some wordless menace, like the unrest that fills the world during a solar eclipse.

"It seems foolish to say there's no way out of this," he contended as his narrowed eye still again traversed the rugged amphitheater of peaks. "It's God's open country, after all, and no valley with a frontier-line as long as this can be ab-

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solutely impregnable. There *must* be some way through!"

"Then why has it never been found?" I asked.

"Because these people have never *wanted* to find it," was his reply. "They've been happy here. And the more restless spirits have been held down by the old tribal taboos. They'd kill us, I suppose, if they caught us trying to get away."

"Then you intend to get away?" I ventured. Pareso, of late, had not taken me any too closely into his confidence.

"When I find a pass through those peaks," asserted my companion, with the old restless look once more in his eyes.

"And how about Thera?" I asked. And his eye, for the first time, met mine.

"She must be taken with us," was the slightly delayed answer. "But in that, of course, there will always be a double danger."

I stood silent a moment. I tried to picture that queenly figure, clad in a capote and moccasins of goatskin, battling through wintry passes and scaling rocky parapets and fighting a perilous way over icy moraines.

"How about Knutsson?" I inquired with a carelessness that was more paraded than real. And at that name, I noticed, Pareso's gaunt face hardened again.

"You know what's happening there?" he demanded.

"I know," I acknowledged.

"I tried to stop that," explained the man at my side. "I saw it coming. And I did my best to keep Knutsson away. I took him out with me, day after day, and did what I could to keep him busy at other things. But it did no good."

"Apparently not," I acknowledged.

"I know Knutsson," averred the frowning Pareso. "He's merely an animal. And he probably wouldn't give us a second thought, if it came to a pinch. So our problem, next to keeping our skins whole, is to save him from himself. We've got to go through with this. And we've no time to lose."

I had the feeling that Pareso was not telling me everything that lay in his mind. Reticence, I remembered, was one of his strong points. And he had the trick of acting a move or two ahead of the game. Yet whatever his secret motives, we were all in the same boat, and surrounded by the same dangers.

"But why the need for hurry?" I queried as our leader, deep in thought, paced back and forth in front of the outlandish Arctic temple with its grotesquely carved beam-ends.

"Haven't you seen what's taking place?" challenged Pareso as he came to a stop in front of me.

"I've seen a number of things," I acknowledged, "and there are other things I've merely suspected."

"Well, there's clearly a split in the ranks here," explained our leader. "You may have noticed, in the matter of this temple-worship, that it's mostly the women and children and the old men who continue to go through with the services and keep to their promise of leaving tribute. The younger braves, the fighting men, seem to have seceded from the old faith. We've shaken the dust off their old gods and they've started to question their tribal taboos. To make things worse, this Pennekuk seems to be feeding them on enough hate-talk to keep their unrest alive. And now they're even making capital out of this volcano eruption."

I remembered, at the moment, what Ota had said about the old story of the Haunted Pass.

"Then why can't we take our turn at capitalizing this Kiooka eruption?" I asked. "Since they blame us for the outbreak, it's naturally our duty to appease these gods who are kicking up all the disturbance. To propitiate those gods we'd have to take their Sookinook, and also Knutsson, the Fire-God, and the whole temple outfit, for that matter, up to Kiooka. We could take 'em up there for the rites expected of us. That gives us a good reason for a dignified retreat into the higher regions of the Bad Lands, where we could push farther on and find a pass through the mountains."

"There is no pass," proclaimed the morose-eyed Pareso.

"There is," I contended.

"And who would find it for us?"

"I will," I proclaimed. And having told him of my talk with the herd-girl, I proposed that Ota and I should equip ourselves for two or three days in the upper hills and make our reconnaissance.

But it was only grudgingly that Pareso at last swung in with my proposal.

"I don't see why women have to figure in all our plans," he none too graciously observed.

"Women," I retorted, "*always* figure in the plans of men!"

And I spoke more truly, I was to discover, than I had at the moment reason to believe.

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CHAPTER X

THE PATH ALONG THE SKY

OTA'S search for information as to passes over those encircling mountains could not be called eminently successful. She unearthed rumors, it is true, just as she gleaned echoes of the old traditions and fragments of old beliefs. But one contradicted the other, and hope did not burn in my heart until the girl smuggled in to me the toothless old grandmother of Olaka, who, for a handful of our highly colored trade-candy, mumbled a long and inconsequential story about her father's father.

This brave, according to her tale, had been a very great hunter of the *nanook*—the bear—before those animals had disappeared from the surrounding hills. He would even defy the angry gods and climb three and four "sleeps" into the mountains, and the year before his death, after crawling home with frozen hands and feet, he told of piercing those mountains and meeting up with a dark-faced stranger who gave him a knife of *aviuk*—ivory—and pointed out to him in which direction lay the *Culelulewak-Noona,* which meant the Land of the White Whale.

And the old hag stuck to her story, stating that she herself as a child had slept on a bearskin which her grandfather had carried back into the valley. When I inquired as to the color of that skin, knowing well enough that the white-furred polar bear would be utterly out of question in such a region, she replied that the skin was not white, but dark and long-haired and of great size. And that gave me something to think about.

"Ask her," I commanded Ota, who was interpreting for me, "if she knows in which hills these *nanook* were once found, if she has any idea of the direction her grandfather took when he went on his mountain hunts."

I watched the rheumy old eyes as they blinked in the corrugated face while Ota was putting these questions to her. And the answer was worth remembering. For as a child, the old woman protested, her mother had often warned her that if she went too far from the topick, if she went too far up in the Bad Lands where the Oil Lake stood, she would be eaten alive by a prowling *nanook.* So that region, plainly, was the place where the mountain-bears roamed. And beyond that region, it was equally obvious, the old-time hunter would have penetrated to meet the darker-skinned stranger with the *aviuk* knife.

It was not much to go on; yet it was all we had. The more I thought it over, however, the more I was persuaded there might be some inkling of truth in the old dame's maunderings. And when Ota and I quietly made ready and as quietly stole away through the sleeping village, we headed toward the Lake of Oil and the Bad Lands that were a taboo to her tribe.

"Are you afraid?" I asked the slender-bodied but sinewy girl at my side as we climbed steadily above the valley fog and reached the higher slopes where the grass-lands ended and even the stunted timber grew sparser in growth.

"With you, O Fire-Stone, I am never afraid," was the quiet-toned answer that came back to me.

"And if we found a path over the mountains?" I suggested as we trudged on.

"Am I not to be always with you?" asked the girl.

"But if we fought our way through to the outer world, the world of my people who are not like your people, would you be unhappy then for the home you would never know again?"

"To that," answered Ota as her hand sought and clasped mine in the half-light, "I have already given answer."

I should have been happier over that speech, I know, than I actually was. For it's not often in this world that man is rewarded with more loyalties than he deserves—unless, of course, he is a master and lover of dogs. But Ota, I remembered, was something more than a retriever at my heels. She was a human being, a budding woman with all a woman's capacity for joy and sorrow. And I, in more ways than one, was responsible for her, for her life, for her safety to-day and her happiness to-morrow. She still thought me a sort of human miracle, as wonderful, almost, as Pareso's binoculars which could make a jack-pine jump up close to you and a mountain-peak suddenly bend down to your side. I was a hero to her, and as such I had a rôle to sustain.

Yet as we went on, mounting always to higher and higher levels, there was an appeasing sense of comradeship in having Ota there at my side. It may have disconcerted me a little, of course, when I glanced at her in the clearing light and beheld her *kooletah* fantastically decorated with the entrails of the broken nickel watch which I had given her. But under her shoulder-pack that held a rawhide scaling-ladder

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and a sleeping-robe and a seven-day supply of native pemmican, she stood as straight as a willow-wand and went on as untiring as an athlete.

No complaint came from her, even when my own broad shoulders were galled by the second pack that made up the rest of our equipment. And she was good to look at, I had to acknowledge in the clearing morning light as we skirted the malodorous Lake of Oil and sought a trail through the rockier buttes beyond it. There was grace in every movement as she clambered as agile as a deer up the broken granite slopes or mounted a pinnacle to study out a passageway through the promontories and walls that opposed us.

But I could not help thinking of an ampler and fairer and queenlier figure in the wide valley which we had left behind us, a figure that seemed imperial in its unstudied grace, absolute in its mysterious and immemorial beauty. And I was young enough and foolish enough to resent the thought that I could have only the hand-maiden while the queen remained with another. For youth, in its blindness, has little patience with the second-best. Only when it is too late can we learn how relative are all our classifications and how unstable are all such earthly arrangements.

"You are thinking of Thera," said Ota as we stopped to rest and eat, well above the timber-line.

"Why do you say that?" I asked, looking back into the misty valley that was a diminished bowl of green stippled with the silver threads of its waterways.

"Men's eyes are always sad when they think of Thera," was the unexpected reply from the girl beside me.

"She is not for me," I retorted, almost curtly.

"She is not for any man," announced Ota as she took her turn at staring back into the valley. And while I wondered if this could indeed be true, I fell to remembering how great beauty seemed to bring only great sorrow in its wake, how Helen of Troy had brought only disaster to her country and distress to her home, how Laura of Padua was the unwitting source of much suffering, and Elaine of Astolat and Deirdre of Erin and Mary Queen of Scots found no lasting joy in a world where their beauty flamed like a fire and went out in a gust of tears.

OF THESE things I thought as I sat on a limestone ridge beside a sheep-girl who sewed watch-heels on her *kooletah* and chewed a pemmican of pounded meal and goatmeat between her square white teeth and licked the grease from her fingers with the same lips that I had kissed in the tree-muffled moonlight.

Yet those lips were coral-red with youth and there was womanly loveliness in the line of the rounded neck that melted into the milky-skinned shoulders when the rough *kooletah* stood open at the throat. And there was softness and tenderness in the blue eyes, so indistinguishably oblique, that studied me from under a childishly frowning brow. And a wayward impulse, born of loneliness and desperation, went slowly through my body and prompted me to reach for the hand that lay so close to my own.

I took possession of that unresisting hand, and held it for a moment, and felt a chill strike into my bones as a wind from the snow-covered slopes bore down on me. And the smoke of Kiooka, rising thinly over my shoulder, reminded me of other things.

"We must be getting on," I said as I rose to my feet.

Ota, without further question or hesitation, followed me in making ready for the trail again. One of the most disarming things about her, in fact, was her continuous quiet passivity, her unvarying acquiescence to each wayward mood and movement of my own. And allegiance like that, I felt, imposed a pretty solemn duty on a man.

But I soon had other things to take up my thoughts. For as we climbed higher and higher along that rugged rampart of peaks the choosing of a trail became more and more a matter of study and foresight. Sometimes, indeed, finding ourselves in a defile that had no outlet, we were compelled to retrace our steps and realign the landmarks that would be needed for our final descent into the valley.

Sometimes we had broken rock walls to ascend and fissures to crowd through and narrow ledges to traverse. When we came to a glacial-green stream, as cold as death, I carried Ota across the shallow torrent, carried her on my shoulder with a consolatory sense of warmth from her clinging body. But ledge by ledge and fissure by fissure we kept ascending. And before our first day was over we had floundered through a snow-field and crept across a sloping moraine of ice.

We were so well up in the clouds that the cold began to bother us and I had some difficulty in finding a camping-spot suf-

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ficiently protected from the wind that swept through those towering peaks. Eventually, however, I stumbled on a bowl-like shelf of schist that faced back over the valley and was comparatively free of snow. We had no wood for a fire, of course, but here we ate our frugal supper and unrolled our sleeping-robes and made ready for rest.

That night, I remember, there was an exceptionally brilliant display of Northern Lights, so vivid in color that they gave a touch of unreality to everything about us and kept me from sleeping. Streams of color swung and swayed above my head, rustling there like titanic curtains whose lower fringes seemed almost within touch of the hand. They were every color, orange, apple-green, opal and lavender, rose and yellow, but with the green always preponderant, so that the light they cast over the timeless peaks and slopes about me was greener than the light filtered through a thousand leaves, greener than sea-water.

But as time went on the undulations of these streamers became less frantic. They died down like sea-waves, and with the dying down of the movement the intensity of their color also decreased. That pageantry of tone and tint seemed to be passing away, as a summer thunder-storm passes away, only to swing back again with redoubled vigor, once more drenching the world with whirlpools and swirls and wheels and eddies of dancing color. And as I lay there watching the last flutter of the inverted apple-green flames and wondering if the silken rustling that seemed to fill the air was a real sound or the product of an overtired mind, I was startled by the touch of a small hand on my shoulder.

When I looked about I saw that it was Ota, the Ota whom an hour before I had rolled closely up in her sleeping-robe and left nested in a little rock-hollow of her own, a good twelve feet away.

We slept long and deep that night and I faced the light of morning even as a small windrow of snowflakes had drifted in on our bodies.

BEFORE TWO hours of travel that morning we found ourselves, to all appearances, at the end of our trail, carefully as that trail had been chosen.

I could discern no possible path of advance. Much as I hated to turn back defeated, I saw before us only impassable slopes of snow and impregnable walls of rock. The danger of getting hopelessly lost in that skyey wilderness increased with every mile we left behind us. And the more imminent danger of tumbling over a snow-lip into a crevasse increased with every foot we mounted.

But even to mount farther now seemed an impossibility. So I sat down to digest my defeat, to school my mind to the thought of turning back.

Out of that mood of lassitude, however, I was wakened by a small cry from Ota, whom, for the moment, I had forgotten. The slender-bodied sheep-girl was standing on a small point of rock above me, pointing upward. I could not at first make out either the object of her gaze or the cause of her excitement. But high above the crags and defiles that lay between us I finally discerned a mountain-goat. Even as I looked I could see that solitary small animal turn and go higher up the ramparting white slope and disappear between two shoulders of darker rock.

"That means there is a way out," cried Ota. "For he could not live on rock and snow. There must be some path down to where his food is."

I knew little about such animals. But I could see well enough that there was nothing to support life in the terrain about us.

"That leads to the pass," repeated Ota, with her eyes fixed on the small *V* between the shoulders against the pallid blue sky.

"But I'm not a goat," I objected, disheartened by the roughness of the territory that lay between us and the shoulder-vent toward which the girl was staring.

"Can you go where I go?" was Ota's question as she clambered down to my side.

"I can!" I proclaimed, a little nettled by that challenge from a figure so diminutive and yet so determined.

"Then we must find the pass!"

What we went through, during the next few hours, would be no easy thing to describe. Nor do all the details of it remain clear in my mind. How we used the scaling ladder and hauled each other up bald rock-faces; how we foundered through snow-fields and crept, tied together, over perilous slopes of glacial-ice that fell off into emptiness; how we crawled up fissures and clefts and steadied each other along narrow ledges that overlooked infinitude; how we lowered ourselves into pockets and waited huddled together until snow-flurries beat out their fury and went on again, with our eyes always on the two grim shoulders against the pallid blue sky—all this is no longer a matter of remembrance.

But in the end we reached a narrow defile through which the wind ramped and

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snow blew in intermittent gusts. And we saw that we were no longer ascending. As we beat our way forward, in fact, the clouds parted and the weather cleared and at the end of that narrow pass we looked down on another world.

It may not have been a world especially beautiful to the eye, for all I could see was a series of diminishing foot-hills overhung by snow-clouds, with somber splotches of darker valley-land between them, and beyond that again snow-fields and coulees and hog-backs that melted into a long and lonely line of tundra extending on the right as far as the eye could see. But it meant delivery, a possible escape from prison, the promise of a road back to the world that had been taken away from us. And as I stood on that windy threshold, staring at those desolate enough slopes, very much as Cortez must once have stared down at the Pacific, absurd waves of happines swept through my tired body and drove the coldness out of my blood.

"There's a way out," I said aloud.

And Ota pressed closer to catch the words that had fallen from my lips.

"Where would it take us?" asked the girl at my side, staring with clouded eyes at the receding tiers of hills that to her meant only the Unknown.

"It must lead down to tide-water," I answered.

But I knew by her face that she did not understand me.

"It is a very big and cold country," she said.

"But it leads back to my own people," I explained to her, plainly bewildering her by my lightness of heart. I even felt a sudden impatience to be on my way along those downward slopes. I nursed an impulse to toss everything to the winds and step over that threshold while it was still open to us.

But the thought of Thera rose mistily in my mind. And there was Pareso to remember, as well as Knutsson. And my heart would never be at peace, I knew, if I betrayed those comrades in peril, if I thought only of my own escape.

"We must go back," I said as I turned away from that lonely yet alluring vista. And half an hour later we were struggling through snow, knee-deep, fighting our way back to the imprisoning valley that was no longer a prison.

IT WAS at the transept end of the Temple of the Concourse that I found Thera, stooping over a spinning-wheel Knutsson had patiently carpentered together for her use. Her sandaled foot rested on the rocking treadle and the massed gold of her hair was luminous in the side-light that fell across her loosely-gowned shoulders. And her eyes, as she spun the rough native wool into threads, were remote and ruminative. There was something so elemental, so timeless, in that picture of her as she stooped over her purring wheel, that it made me think of a page of Homer come to life. She seemed as remote as a figure on an Athenian frieze. I could have stooped and clasped her knees, as that happier blond-haired giant had clasped them in the leaf-filtered moonlight. But she seemed as inaccessible, in my newer mood, as a mountain-peak clothed in snow.

"You have been away," she quietly observed as she looked up. "I missed you."

"I have been up in the mountains that lie beyond the Temple of the Summit," I acknowledged.

"And why did you face danger like that?" she asked, as she turned to arrange the wool on her distaff.

"To see if there was a gateway to the outer world," was my answer. "And I have found one."

The brooding azure eyes slowly turned and gazed into mine.

"Then you are greater than Karl Knutsson," she finally observed.

"Only in mastering mountain-trails," was my slightly embittered response.

"But he failed, where you succeeded," she pointed out.

I faced her lovelines without flinching.

"And *I* failed, where *he* succeeded," I reminded her.

She looked at me, long, and silently, arrested by the unhappiness in my eyes.

"But I love you, David," she cried with a deeper color in her cheek. "I love you for what you are and what you've done. And I want you to love me!"

Having said that, she did an unexpected thing. She stood up before me and held out her arms to me. She moved toward me, almost wistfuly. And I, who had tried to tell myself that I had nothing in common with her, that our destinies lay implacably apart, felt the old power and the old madness sing through my blood, and I took her in my arms.

When her arms were withdrawn, oddly enough, she reached to my belt for my knife and with it cut off a single tress of her hair and thrust it into my hand.

"Keep that—always!" she whispered.

I scarcely knew what it meant, at the

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time, but my steps were none too steady as I turned away.

I found Pareso, half an hour later, and told him the news about the pass.

"We'll get out of this hell-hole," he coolly proclaimed. "I've already told Attapok and his Fish-Eaters we're to take their Sookinook back to her upper temple, for the appeasement of Kiooka. And we'll make that ceremony our exit-speech."

So our preparations for departure began. Our equipment, Pareso explained, should be as complete yet as compact as possible. Each one of us should carry as much food as could be taken without exciting undue suspicion, and for each, too, there must be a blanket or sleeping-robe, for the open nights on the outland trail would be cold. Twelve especially selected braves, he further explained, had already been picked out to carry Sookinook's ceremonial gold, which had already been solemnly packed and sewn in sheepskin bags. The depleted duffel-bag, which Pareso still kept under lock and key, would be taken care of by that chief himself after a distribution of numerous trinkets at the final tribal rites. Then the tribal goddess, accompanied by her handmaiden, Ota, and guarded by twenty headmen, would be carried in her draped throne-chair to the lower approaches of the mountain temple, where at nightfall the burning of our last fragments of Greek-fire would proclaim her propitious entrance into her former abode.

I was not unconscious, from that hour forward, of a new note of excitement running throughout the temple group. One person who seemed to remain outwardly unmoved was Knutsson. That giant, after fitting an ominously long shaft to an ominously heavy spear-head, busied himself in the fashioning of a crescent-bladed battle ax which he lashed to a curved haft with thongs of rawhide.

He toiled silently and sullenly over this strangely medieval weapon so suggestive of Berserker days. He showed, oddly enough, no great joy over the discovery of the pass that had so electrified the rest of us into action, though I wrote down his smoldering resentment, at the time, to the fact that another had succeeded where he himself had so manifestly failed.

But peril, I found, was clustering more closely about Knutsson and his companions than any of us imagined. Pareso, indeed, may have sensed this, for one of his first moves was to assemble his twelve dubious tribesmen, load them down with his precious goatskin bags and, with his revolver in his hand, convoy them quietly out past the thinning fringe of the topick settlement. Their exact destination, once they were in the hills, he kept strictly to himself. But I found it hard to fight down the impression that there was a strain of folly running through any such stubbornly venal side-movement. For at that particular juncture, I felt, there were more important things than a few dozen bags of yellow metal, though Pareso merely laughed and remarked that a hammer of gold has broken open many a gate of iron.

On the same night, under cover of darkness, our chief dispatched Ota and me to a point in the lower hills, where we cached two emergency packs of dried goat-meat. We had started back, consolingly close in the midnight darkness, when the girl caught at my arm.

"What is it?" I asked as I turned to follow the line of her gaze. But I needed no answer to that question. For as I looked I saw a mounting flare of fire, high in the forbidding hills to the northwest of where we stood.

"It's the Temple of Sookinook," murmured the girl, a touch of awe in her voice. "They are burning Sookinook's temple."

I knew it was true. And a second faint chill crept into my blood as I watched the flames mount higher and a ruddy collapse of roof-timbers told me that our upland house of mystery with its carved gold and its shattered sarcophagus of glacial ice was already a thing of the past.

"We must hurry!" I cried as we turned and headed back toward our companions.

It was Pareso himself who intercepted me at the edge of the concourse. "You see what they've done to us!" was his quietly embittered cry.

He turned, as he spoke, and stared at the dying glow that winded like an evil eye from the rim of the hills.

"They've burned the upper temple," I acknowledged.

"They've done more than that," averred Pareso. "They've stolen two hundred spears and have just tried to burn us out here by planting a cresset of fire against our temple-timbers. I gave them a Roman-candle against their buttocks, and they must have thought it was the Devil himself on their heels for they went tearing off like frightened rabbits. But we've got to get up in those hills before they know what we're headed for. Perhaps you haven't noticed how carefully all the women and children have been taken down to the lower en-

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campment. And the only thing that means now is warfare."

WE WERE inside the barbarically carved building by this time, where, I noticed, our packs were already piled together.

"Get Thera and Knutsson," commanded Pareso. "Those regal Nordics can finish their sleep when we've climbed into a quieter neighborhood."

My spirits were heavy as I put what remained of my goods together and pondered on what the next few days, on what even the next few hours, might hold in store for us. A sense of unreality fell about me and everything around me, a feeling of instability like that which overtakes one when an earthquake shakes man's tenuous faith in *terra firma*. And that feeling was not diminished when I went to the temple door, and, looking out, perceived that Kiooka was once more in eruption and pouring a muffling cloud of smoke and ash across the opal-green sky.

But even that was forgotten, the next moment, when I turned and stared into the startled face of Ota.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"They have gone!" she said in a voice touched with awe.

"They have gone?" I repeated, rather vacuously. It took a moment or two, apparently, for the full meaning of her words to filter through to my brain. "Who says they've gone?"

But I did not wait for an answer. With an absurdly sinking heart I ran toward the skin-hung sleeping chamber, toward the humble rough couch that labor and loving care had struggled to make queenly, toward the canopied mattress of ptarmigan-feathers covered with plaited rabbit-skin where night by night a queenly visitor had rested in queenly sleep. And I found it empty, just as two minutes later I found the disordered wall-bunk of Knutsson empty.

Not only were they gone, but as well were their meager possessions, the long-handled spear and the moon-shaped battle-ax, the *Kooletah* bordered with gold, the plaited fur sleeping-robe, the steel hunting-knife, even the precious pocket-compass I had so carefully brought back from the hills.

I sat down sick at heart, consumed with a feeling of betrayal, of desertion. I said nothing, for there was nothing to say.

Not so Pareso, however, who followed Ota into the little sleeping chamber. He stood, for a moment, staring down at the empty bed still redolent of that superb body which had rested in it. Then his hands clenched and unclenched, spasms of rage went through his gaunt frame, and he fell to cursing in a language that was strange to me.

"She would leave us!" he gasped. "And with that bullock! With that animal without the brains of a rabbit! Ha, but he will pay for this, fool that he is! Before the week is out he will come crawling back on broken feet, cringing to us to take him in! And without me, me, she will see how helpless she is. She will crawl back and ask to be taken care of, to be saved from a death even worse than her earlier one! Ha, so this is how she treats me? I gave her life, and this is my reward! I forgot that she was a woman, and trusted her!"

I couldn't have paid much attention to him as he raved on, for my thoughts, at the moment, were on Thera. I pictured her as daring the unknown pass, as battling through wind and snow to that sterile outer world, contending with hunger and fatigue, staggering on until she came to some friendly igloo where she would be taken in by small and slant-eyed people who would feed her walrus-meat and wonder at her strange tongue. I tried to picture her as sleeping on a willow mat, between deerskins, under an arching roof of iceblocks dewed with sweat from a seal-oil lamp, lying there swallowed up in some lonely Arctic waste.

She belongs to me!" I heard Pareso crying out in a voice thick with rage. "I brought her back, and she is mine. I breathed the breath of life into her body and. . . ."

"But where is she?" I interrupted, tired of all that loose talk.

"To-night," cried Pareso, "she is with her rabbit-brained giant. But to-morrow, mark you, she will be coming to us for help."

I DON'T know what prompted me to defend the woman who had indeed deserted him. But I turned on Pareso with a flash of anger that seemed beyond my control.

"I don't see that you gave her so much!"

"I gave her life," he shouted back. "She belonged to me!"

"And what would you have done with her?" I mocked, conscious of the renewed rumblings of Kiooka that were taking place beyond the outlandish walls that still enclosed us.

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"I had my own ends for her," maintained Pareso.

"Well, she seems to have had an end or two for herself," I said as Ota placed a corded knapsack at my feet.

Then I crossed to the door, where I stood studying the heavens, perplexed by the mist that had blotted out the stars and thrown such an unearthly light on everything about us.

"We must go by the back way," Ota was whispering through that uncannily decreasing light.

I thought, as Pareso joined us and we started out, that there would be some expression of regret from Ota, some sign of heart-heaviness at leaving what had been her one and only home. But she trudged on in front of me, picking her way as she went. She uttered no single word of complaint as we circled through the deserted topicks and crosed the empty valley bottom and began to climb to the rougher ground that marked the approach to the Forbidden Hills. We could feel the ascent, by this time; for our packs were heavy. But we kept resolutely on until Ota stopped us with a gesture.

"Wait," she said as she crept forward and vanished in the foggy air. And we waited, ready enough to depend on her acuter animal-like keenness of scent and hearing.

"We must not go this way," she warned us on her return. "There is a trap, and many men hidden behind rocks. They are men with arrows. We must go back and climb to the pass by way of the Black Oil Lake."

So back we went.

"We can thank God for this ash-fog," averred Pareso as we resumed our climb. "I suppose it will stay with us?"

"That is because of Kiooka," explained the girl. "It is the fire and smoke from his angry heart."

"Could we make the pass, in weather like this?" I abruptly asked Ota as she hesitated over one of two trails between the glacial baldheads about us.

"It would not be easy," she admitted. "But the wind is rising," she announced as she moistened a forefinger and held it above her head. And she was not mistaken, for five minutes later I could feel the colder breath of that mountain wind on my forehead wet with sweat. It seemed to sweep cleaner air along the broken hillsides, for the sting in my nose and throat became less acute and the twilight that surrounded us became more ragged and thin, like a harbor-mist hit by a land-breeze.

"If it clears," proclaimed Pareso as we stopped once more to get our breath, "we'll have to slip under cover for the rest of the day. For as I remember this terrain, we could still be seen from the valley. And another night's climb should take us forever out of their reach."

"But there's still Thera," I reminded him.

"She'll come back to us," he said with a conviction which, at the moment, didn't seem based on reason. "It's not Knutsson she wants. It's life."

I was still thinking over this when, half an hour later, the clearing air drove us under cover behind a shielding rampart of rock. We could now see Kiooka belching a plume of smoke that pennoned off southward in the wind. Below us, on our left, lay the black surface of the Lake of Oil, taking on sinister ebon glints as its surface reflected the pallid light. It impressed me as ugly and futile and meaningless, a malodorous monument to the folly of superstition of a tribe long given over to crooked thinking. But Pareso, I noticed, studied it with a less disdainful eye.

"For that, too, I shall some day come back," he proclaimed as he stood surveying the curving dike that held back their eternally wasting reservoir of energy. But I was too tired to give much thought to his words. I could feel weariness surge through my body, deadening wave by wave, leaving in its wake an indifference that made me drowsily reckless as to the present and disdainful as to the future. I merely saw that Ota was on watch behind our little rock rampart and that the natural hollow in the stone beside me called as invitingly as a bed.

CHAPTER XI

THE BATTLE IN THE CLOUDS

I WAS awakened by the sound of a pistol-shot uncomfortably close to my ear. When I looked up I saw Pareso leaning against a rock and staring through a small cloud of smoke into the valley beneath him.

"Did I get him?" he was demanding of Ota. And the girl, I noticed, shook her head in negation.

"That means we'll soon have the whole tribe up here," said Pareso as he dropped back under cover.

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"That is Komok the Runner," explained the girl, peering over the stone-ridge. "He hurries to join his people who are hidden in the birch grove far below. There are many hundreds of them."

Pareso was inspecting the terrain both below and above us.

"They'll have us pretty well hemmed in here?" he half asked of the still watching Ota.

"We must go lower again," explained the girl, "and circle back nearer the trail that once led to the Temple of Sookinook. By that road only can we reach the pass."

Pareso sat thinking this over.

"What they need, then, is a little discouragement in their hill-climbing," he observed as he stooped over his duffel-bag. "And I'm going to give it to them."

"But they will wait until night comes," prompted the girl leaning on the parapet of stone.

"Then I'll be ready for them," proclaimed Pareso as he rose to his feet. His face, I noticed, was unnaturally grim.

"What are you going to do?" I asked as he started down the broken hillside.

"Wait and see," was his none too satisfactory answer. But I could see, as I watched, that he was advancing in the direction of the oil-lake dike. I could also see, lower in the valley, a series of smoke-signals go from point to point. Twice, also, Ota and I heard the far-off drumming of a keelon.

But Pareso remained away much longer than I had expected. The light thinned and the prolonged northern twilight set in and still again we heard the muffled throb of keelons.

"They are coming," announced Ota, staring down through the spectral air. "See, they come!"

I had some difficulty in seeing them, at first, for nothing was distinct in the falling darkness. But, once I had made sure of that living mass of spearmen advancing so guardedly and yet so steadily up the wide hollow between us, I felt that practically the entire tribe was there in the field. It seemed like an army. And my blood chilled as I watched its silent yet purposeful ascent.

"What in God's name is keeping Pareso?" I cried out as that blurred mass advanced so malevolently and so steadily up the long slope.

The answer to that question did not come from Ota, who stood so close at my side. It came, instead, from the shadows below the lake-dike, where the silence was ruptured by a sudden thunder of sound and the darkness was rent by a rose of flame that flowered for a second and went out again.

It went out again, but even as I looked and listened and understood that Pareso must have blown up the lake-dike with what remained of his high explosive, I realized that the same blast that had shattered the embankment had also set fire to the escaping oil. For as I stared down through the darkness I could see a sudden serpent of ruby widen out into a rivulet of crimson and expand again miraculously into an opening fan of smoke-crowned flame. It seemed to gather speed as it went, so that the roar of its flight filled the air and its ever-advancing first wave appeared to be an army of dancing red devils, red devils who leaped over rocks and pirouetted into hollows and snapped up every growing thing as they went. And loud as its roar was, I could catch the sudden note of a higher-pitched sound, the sound from a hundred throats as that river of fire swept down on the startled army of Attapok.

How many it caught between the higher shoulders of that widening lateral valley I could not say. But it came down on them like a breath out of hell, leaving them little time for escape, crisping them as a forest-fire crisps oak-leaves, tossing them in a blackening heap as lightly as a mountain-torrent tosses quartz-sand into a bar. A great pillar of smoke boiled up in the air, rolling out lateral billows as it rose, shifting and changing like thunderclouds before the outbreak of a storm.

This, in one way, interfered with my vision of a scene that was innately horrible, even while it added to its final texture of horror. But as that hungry tide swept forward I could see that a still expanding river of destruction was carrying everything with it, was leaving nothing behind it. Its movement seemed more leisured, it is true, by the time it reached the valley bottom. There was even a venomous sort of deliberation in the way in which it advanced on the hundreds of empty topicks and circled menacingly about the glittering Temple of the Concourse. I could see the smaller structures go up like chaff, carried away in a coiling tumult of flame. But the temple itself, refusing to be swept off its feet, seemed fighting for its life, seemed to be defying its oppressors, like a buffalo-bull fighting off a pack of wolves. But it could

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not last for long. Even as I looked I could see the far-off flames licking up the shadowy side-walls, mounting to the roof, meeting in an evil arch of triumph. Then a higher torch of flame flowered in the graying air, burned itself out, and collapsed with a final burst of smoke shot through with geysers of sparks. And the wolves of red, seeing that their work in that quarter was well done, prowled on to the remoter lowlands, where they slunk about devouring each and every trace of life that lay in their path.

AS I watched, I knew that something more than an army had been destroyed and a city of topicks wiped out. I knew that the home of Ota and of Attapok was no more in the valley; and that the keelons and tom-toms of spearmen would no longer sound between the hills. I knew that slant-eyed women would no longer card wool under those pallid skies; that brawny youth would no longer dig yellow metal from those sullen northern mountains; that white-skinned girls would bathe no more in those limpid northern lakes that bubbled warm from the volcanic rocks where they lay cupped; that a strangely isolated people had been burned out of their last aerie as completely as a colony of tent-caterpillars might have burned out of a treetop.

A half hour later our chief came toiling up the hillside with his pack-bag over his shoulder and a dozen yellow spear-heads, broken from their shafts, dangling at his side.

He said little, but there was a glitter in his eye not altogether to my liking.

"What are we to do?" I demanded.

"*Jamais arrière!*" he cried as he pointed toward the mountain-peaks that towered above us. "There's nothing to hold us here."

"How about Thera?" I reminded him as we took up our way again with Ota leading as we went.

"Ah, no trace of them?" he soliloquized aloud. Then he laughed one of his unpalatably mirthless laughs. "But she will come back to us, you'll find," he concluded.

I made no answer to that statement, for Ota had stopped before a fissure-edge that suddenly confronted her, reminding us that we must bear to the right if we were eventually to work upward toward the pass.

"But that will not take us to the Temple of Sookinook," objected Pareso, staring frowningly through the uncertain light.

"The temple is burned," Ota reminded him.

"But my gold is there," persisted Pareso. "It's there, cached on a rock-ledge behind the temple site."

"Gold," I contended, "won't feed us on the way out." And I felt a sudden new sense of remoteness from this man at my side.

"But I must take out enough to make them believe," he maintained. "I can't go without my gold!"

It seemed childish, all things considered, even worse than childish. But he refused to listen to reason. He wanted his gold, and he intended to get it. And if I declined to make that detour back to the Temple of the Summit he would go by himself and carry out what he was able to.

"Then we'll wait for you on the upper trail," I finally conceded. "This fissure widens to a canyon and later on becomes a crevasse. But to get past the glacier-wall where it ends, you've got to be on this side of the lead."

"Don't worry about me," retorted Pareso. "I've climbed mountains, my lad, before you were born."

"But you'll climb none after you're dead," I was exasperated enough to retort as he made ready for his detour.

He swung about, at that taunt from me, and faced me with some semblance of his old fire. He drew himself up to his full height, leveling one long finger at my face.

"Wait for me!" he said in a voice of thunder.

But I was too weary and heartsick to be much impressed by his histrionics. Between us seemed to yawn an abyss as tangible as the fissure that lay within a dozen paces of where we stood. I even nursed the wayward impression that from that hour forward we belonged to different worlds. So it was Ota, and not I, who answered him.

"We will wait," said the girl at my side.

THE human brain, I've found, can register just so many impressions. There is a limit to the mind's power of absorption just as there is a limit to the stomach's grosser power of digestion. And event was so crowded on event during that last frantic flight of ours that I had no clear-cut knowledge of when and how we ate, of when and where we fell asleep, and of when night merged so imperceptibly

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bly into day and day again paled into its modified northern darkness.

But it must have been early morning when I wakened again, with Ota's sleeping body near my own and with the rime of her breath showing white along the dark edges of her parka. An odd sense of security then crept through me as I glanced about our sleeping-place and realized how cunningly had been chosen that skyey bivouac for the night, a hollowed-out ledge on the face of the broken cliff that towered above us, commanding a view of the canyons and laterals and valleys far below.

I was glad enough to be above and beyond them, and my sense of security was slowly ripening into one of gratitude at some final escape when I was disturbed by a small and trivial thing much nearer at hand. Everything about us was silent; and everything in the lower levels was without stir or movement. But just beyond the rock-lip over which I was gazing I perceived a second intermittent small cloud of mist between me and the open light.

Then slowly, above the lip of the rock, I saw a human hand lift itself and grope for a hold on the weathered ridge of stone. It was a strong hand and a sinewy one. And its movements seemed malignant, like those of a serpent, as it so silently shifted and explored from side to side.

I could see nothing of the body beneath it, but I knew it was the hand of an enemy. I knew, as I waited and watched, that it implied peril for Ota and me. So my jaw tightened as I reached for the belt ax that lay at my side. I don't think I even breathed as I brought that ax-head down, with all my force, on the corded fingers clinging to the rock-lip.

There was one cry, strangely high-pitched, as the shattered hand fell away. I had a brief vision, as I stared over the parapet, of a body tumbling and rolling down a precipitous incline.

"That was Pennekuk," said Ota, suddenly wide awake at my side. But before I could give much thought to that information the valley quietness was broken by a number of pistol-shots. I thought, for a moment, that these were signal-shots from Pareso somewhere astray on his trail back to us. But when these were repeated, in a frantic flurry of detonations implying active combat, I began to suspect that all was not going well with our chief.

And at almost the same time, as though in answer to that unexpected series of sounds, two other figures appeared above our ledge, on the far side of the fissure that cut their world off from our own.

One was blond and stalwart, with a crescent-bladed battle-ax strapped across his wide shoulders and in his great hand a lance twice his own length. Some trick of light seemed to magnify his proportions, so that he loomed above me unbelievably massive, like something out of a legend, gigantic and tawny and martial, oddly suggestive of a Viking chief on the prow of his galliass. There was courage in his poise and a cloudy grimness in his glance. And I knew, as I looked, that it was Karl Knutsson.

But it was the second figure beside him that I studied more closely. For this figure was tall and queenly, with a wealth of yellow gold hair of incredible luster and with an imperial sweep of line as she stood enthroned on that narrow plateau. She was not close to me, but in that cold and wind-clarified air she seemed close enough for speech, close enough for me to make out the beauty of the intently brooding face and the shadowed azure of the eyes so heavily hooded by the brows where Time had left no furrow. And I knew, even before she turned to me, that we had found Thera again.

I must have shouted aloud, without quite knowing what I was doing. And they must have heard me, for they turned and stared at us as we faced them across that narrow fissure.

"We must help Pareso," I could hear Knutsson's great voice bellow out as he started down the broken cliff-face, loosening his corded battle-ax.

I called to Thera, warning her not to follow. If she heard me, she paid no attention to my cry. I could see her step from rock to rock as she sought a downward path after her mate. But I had no chance to follow her movement, for on the lower terrain, closer in to our fissure, I could already hear the renewed barking of Pareso's revolver. A moment later he himself came into view, fighting his way slowly upward, as a small but desperate band of spearmen slunk after him, seeking what cover they could find.

I saw little meaning in their maneuvers, until I realized that they were driving him, step by step, toward a narrow defile overhung by a porphyritic tuff, about the same as medieval doors were once overhung by watch-towers. And still I could not fully understand the nature of that movement, though I saw that Pareso was

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holding off his pursuers. Yet I noticed that he seemed searching for something, that he vacillated from side to side with preoccupied quick glances about him as he went. And the closer he came to the porphyritic ledge the more intent he seemed on that mysterious search.

He was almost under the shadow of that ledge before I understood the nature of his peril. For as I stared down on the strange scene I caught the first betraying sign of life and movement along the top of the ledge itself. I saw figures huddled there, flat on the rock. I made out the glitter of yellow metal, shining malignantly bright as it moved in the clearing morning air. And it was then and only then I realized how Pareso was being driven into an ambuscade.

I tried to warn him, but my voice failed to carry. I made signs and gestures, but he was so intent on his own ends that he paid no attention to me. He wanted his gold—that was the final and foolish thought that ran through my head. Even as he stood in that arrested attitude of perplexity, I could see one of the tribesmen rise from the rock and at the same time lift something above his head. It shone bright and yellow in the clear light. I realized, even as he poised it there above his shoulders, ready for hurling, that it was the battered eagle of gold from the vanished Temple of the Concourse. It was heavy, and it had many jagged points. And it seemed to have been saved for this one embittered end. For the next moment it crashed down on Pareso's head.

It struck him to the ground, like a bolt from the blue. And this seemed a signal for the others to join in that unexpected assault. For, of a sudden, they came scrambling to the edge of the rock-shoulder, each man with a fragment of his hoarded yellow metal in a waiting hand. And fragment by fragment they rained this down on the prostrate figure so close below them. They flung them, methodically yet vindictively, flung them with strange cries of derision, pelted them down with barbaric shouts of hate, until the body was buried under that ironic shower of gold.

I HAD, of course, no way of reaching him, for between me and that flashing pile ran an abyss a hundred feet in depth. That fissure, as irregular yet as clear-cut as a water-lead in an Arctic ice-pack, was much too broad for leaping. And even though the means of bridging the chasm had stood close at hand, it was already too late to be of any help to that lost leader of ours. He was gone from us, for ever.

But even as I stared across the fissure I caught sight of Knutsson emerging from the shadow into the sunlight. His face was grim and his battle-ax was in his bronzed right hand. What arrested my attention, however, was the figure of Thera, who followed close behind him. There must have been another killing somewhere amid those rocks, for even as she stepped out into the open she carried in her hand a native spear with a broken shaft. The tapering head of this spear was stained with blood, which she looked at with an untroubled eye and then casually wiped on the folds of her kooletah. Then she took the broken haft and broke it still shorter, snapping the seasoned wood over her knee and weighing the polished and long-pointed metal head in her hand, as though testing its possibilities as a stabbing instrument.

There was neither terror nor horror on her face, and her voice seemed resolute enough as she called some word of warning to Knutsson, who abruptly ceased his advance and quartered back to her side, where he stood, like a harried moose at bay, awaiting the enemies who declined to advance. So heroic did he look, in that forlorn posture of defiance, that a new respect for the slow-thinking giant sprang up in my heart.

It was then that I called out to them.

"Don't go back!" I shouted. "You must cross the fissure lower down and come up on this side. It's the only way through!"

I don't think they understood me. I can't even be sure that they entirely heard me. Thera, I knew, threw a glance of perplexity in my direction, but it lasted a moment and little more. For it was plain, by this time, that both she and her mate were conscious of some secretive movement escaping my attention.

"Come on, you white-skinned rats!" Knutsson was crying with a sort of berserker fury, shaking his russet fist at the enemies whom I could not decipher. But Thera, I could see, was now leading him backward, step by watchful step, as they guardedly retreated up the broken hillside, beating their way to the higher open ground that paralleled the rock-fissure between us.

Sometimes they were on shale and gravel and sometimes they were on slopes of ice and tilted snow-fields maculated with glacial stones. I don't know whether it

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was mere accident or some phantasmal craving for companionship, but as they ascended, guarded foot by foot, they drew closer and closer to the parapet that separated us, so that I could see the hollowed whiteness of Thera's throat and the knotted muscles on the bronzed and bristled arm of Knutsson.

And then, for the first time, I myself saw the slinking shadows that darted from rock to rock lower down the slope, the telltale flash of spearheads congregating under bits of cover here and there, the sudden flash of an arrow that hurtled through the air and flattened its yellow head against a boulder-face.

I knew well enough what that meant. They were being hemmed in by the desperate remnants of Attapok's tribesmen, by men who were born trailers and hunters, by men who had seen all they had to live for wiped out and in this last assault on a proved enemy would show no shadow of mercy. Knutsson, I think, must have realized this, for there was a grim wariness in every move he made.

Then came a hiatus in all movement, as puzzling to me as it was to Knutsson himself, until I caught sight of old Attapok himself. He hobbled out into the open, making the peace sign, with his right arm held high above his head, palm outward.

I could see no answering sign from Knutsson. He merely stood silent and scowling, studying that audacious old figure, which advanced more cringingly as it drew closer to the giant with the crescent-bladed battle-ax in his right hand. I could not discern the motive behind that movement, but, knowing the wily Attapok as I did, I was on the point of shouting out to the blond giant to beware of treachery. But that warning of mine was not needed.

Whether or not Knutsson concluded the movement to be a deceptive one, whether he caught sight of a hidden weapon under the folds of the old chieftain's clothing, or whether the futility of all further temporizing suddenly possessed him, I had no means of determining. But with a sudden sweep of his brawny arm Knutsson sent the wide-bladed ax flashing through the air. The curving edge of the blade caught the lean and leathery old neck as fairly as a woodsman's ax swings down on a birch bole. And there was power behind it, for it swept the wrinkle-skinned head clean from the huddled shoulders. The body was still upright, geysering crimson, when Knutsson sprang forward to recover his weapon.

And that was the beginning of the fight.

It quickly enough brought the hidden spearmen from under cover, brought them swarming up the rocky slope like hurdle-racers up a hill. Knutsson, as he thrust Thera behind him and faced their first wave of assault, must have known it was kill, and kill without quarter. He used his long-handled spear, and he thrust and struck with a truly titanic ferocity. I saw an arrow flash through the air, and heard his short bark of rage as he plucked it out of his flesh and tossed it aside. And the next moment I saw his spear-shaft snapped in two and the moon-shaped battle-ax once more in his hands.

I saw that flailing blade come down on an intent blond face that had ducked in under his guard, a blond face with a sinister smile of triumph on its lips. But the ax, cleaving deep, cut that smile in two. And the next moment, swinging wide, it cleared a circle about the lone fighter, who shouted for the woman to fall back while she had time.

BUT Thera had no intention of retreating. She flung her spear-head into the belly of a diminutive tribesman who suddenly scuttled down on her, and when another, circling about, missed his thrust and stumbled against her knees, she caught him up bodily and with one regal sweep of her arms flung the absurdly wriggling body into the abyss. Then she snatched up Knutsson's broken spear and fought her way toward her mate, whose blade had fallen from his hand and who, at the moment, was intent on seizing an enemy's head between his bare hands and crushing the tow-haired skull against the rock wall behind him.

Yet all the while, as they fought, they were falling back, step by step, leaving a trail of red across a narrow snow-field and slipping ludicrously as they fidgeted for better footing on small moraines of ice. I could neither join them nor help them. But I thought, for a mad minute or two, that they still had a chance of fighting their way free, that luck would in some way be with them and they would yet live to know quieter hours under quieter skies. But Thera's clothing, by this time, was partly torn from her body, and along one rounded white shoulder I could see a welt of red, where a spear-head had seared into the flesh.

Clear above the smaller noises I could hear her cry of defiance as she thrust her spear-head through a startled lean torso

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and flung body and spear together over the gorge. She had intended, I think, to reach for one of the falling weapons on which they were treading. She had even stooped forward a little when one of the wounded spearmen on the ground, rolling over in a languid half-turn, sent an arrow which he had already fitted to his short bow straight up against her heart.

It sank deep, and even from where I stood I could catch the look of wonder that mounted to Thera's face as her hand went up toward her heart. She did not fall. But she seemed to be groping for the root of a pain which she could not understand. Her wavering right arm, in her extremity, even went out to Knutsson, who saw it and understood. And that embattled Viking, hard pressed as he was, fought back his enemies with the flailing battle-ax in his right hand while his left arm clasped about his mate. But he could not keep them from closing in on him. There were not many of them left, it's true, but the few who remained seemed determined to die in a cause now close to its final moment.

He must, in fact, have realized that his hour had come. For with a final animal-like bellow he turned on his enemies and flung his battle-ax into their midst. Then, before they could quite recover, he took the tall and queenly figure of his mate in his arms and staggered to the lip of the precipice. For just a moment he held the white face close up to his own. I could never be sure whether he kissed her or not. Nor could I be certain of the words that he called out before those two interlocked bodies made that fatal and final plunge.

CHAPTER XII

THE END OF THE TRAIL

OUT of the welter of emotions that surged through my body, like beach-waves through a pound-net, I can remember a later feeling of shame for the way in which I had thought of my one surviving companion. I knew, as we resumed our climb up those perilous slopes, that I had not been fair with Ota. I even recalled that I never could be entirely fair with her. But, if God in His goodness saw fit to deliver us from the dangers that still surrounded us, I could yet make amends. I could at least give her what remained of my wasted life.

I trudged close after her, with my pack on my shoulders, with the silence about us like the silence of death. And I became persuaded, as we toiled painfully on, that we were for all time free of our enemies.

Yet I kept looking back, from time to time, for I wanted no final mishap to interfere with that final flight. My glance, in fact, must have been half averted as we rounded a misty shoulder of rock along that ever-narrowing trail, otherwise I should have more promptly seen what awaited us there on the narrow ledge between the solid mountainside and the perilous lip of the precipice.

But so quickly did we stumble into that unexpected ambush that I had scant time for either thought or action. All I know was that when I looked up, at a small cry from Ota, I found we were confronted by a crouching group of spearmen with their lances poised.

They stood shoulder to shoulder in the narrow portal between the precipitous rock-face and the open chasm. I thought, at first, that there were at least a half-dozen of them. It also flashed through my mind that they must have known those upper hills much better than we'd imagined, for they'd posted themselves at a point where they could most easily cut off our advance and most definitely bring all combat to a final issue.

I caught at Ota's shoulder, to thrust her behind me. But for one brief moment she wavered against me, with her hands clutching my body and her head pressed against my heart. There was even the shadow of a smile on her lips as her eyes sought mine, as she looked hungrily into my face. If I wondered at that look, my wonder was brief. For a thrown spear, flashing past my cheek-bone, buried its head in the pack strapped high on my shoulders. And that seemed a signal for Ota, who broke from my grasp and started forward, with her arms outspread, as though to fling herself on those clustered spear-heads.

I flung her back, almost savagely, as I caught up the spear fallen between my feet. And a moment later I sent the shimmering thin head of it through the entrails of a tribesman who ran for me, head on. A second charge came, as Ota was reaching for that tribesman's fallen weapon. But I faced them and fought them with a drunken fury that left no room for the thought of death. And when I emerged from that final delirium of rage I found Ota standing beside me, with a spear in her hand, ruddied half-way to its hilt.

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I think we killed all of them. I could never be sure, for there was a madness in my blood that left memory none too dependable. But I at least know that nothing remained on that narrow and blood-stained ledge, nothing beyond two or three broken spear-heads which I tied together and swung from my waist. Then, taking Ota by the hand, I began the climb to the pass. I began our fight to get free of those hills, as desolate of heart as the last man left alive on a lost and dying world. . . .

How we got over that pass and fought our way down into the lonely tundra beyond, will never be quite clear to my own mind. I think, most of the time, I was a little out of my head. I can remember plodding on, toiling on and on, through gloaming weather, through snow-streaked mornings and ice-green noons and never-ending twilights empty of all sound, seeking always the lower terrain.

Then we came to a coast and a cluster of igloos, where I bartered a spear-head of gold for food and seal clothing and mukluks of walrus. But these impoverished Eskimos could neither understand our talk nor persuade themselves we were not evil spirits come in their midst. So we forged on again, following the coast-line, where we were finally picked up, half-dead, by a Danish white whaler.

But here again we did not speak the language of our rescuers, though it must have been plain to them that I was a sick man and much in need of their help. I know, however, that both Ota and our whaler captain were much kinder to me than I deserved.

By the time the *Fridtjof* was free of that ice and rounding into Fort Alexander for repairs—after a merciless pounding in the upper Behring Sea—I was on my feet and able to move about again. At Fort Alexander I secured passage for Ota and myself on a coaster down to Prince Rupert, where we were married, and for a season I worked with the halibut-fleet that fished the waters of Dixon Entrance.

But all along I nursed a nostalgia for the South, a craving for warmth and softness. I had a morbid dread of the North. So with the coming of winter Ota and I embarked on a lumber-schooner bound for Honolulu. And in that Edenic climate, while I did not materially mend my fortune working for a thrifty Japanese importer named Shimizu, I gradually forgot my ills of the body. But once I was better in health, I grew vaguely homesick for other things, and in half a year's time returned to Vancouver, where I was once more among my own people and where, eventually, I found a semblance of peace on a fruit-ranch in Okanogan Valley.

And there, sometimes when the quiet-eyed Ota is busy with her household duties and the touch of some old unrest creeps into my blood, I take from its hiding-place a single tress of hair, a tress of hair incredibly and regally golden, and wonder if it once belonged to Thera, the daughter of Olaf, or merely to an unhappy woman once known to the world as Olga Shashkov.

ON THE NEWSSTANDS NOW!

POLARIS AND THE GODDESS GLORIAN

By Charles B. Stilson

Not yet in the stars of Polaris was there charted a homeward voyage, as he had thought when the cruiser *Minnetonka* sailed away from mystic Sardanes. For there beckoned from the waves a weird Golden Man, calling the intrepid son of the snows from his first chosen course, to an incredibly ancient country, and into the strange thralldom of a woman—or was she goddess?—Glorian of Ruthar. . . .

This great novel by the author of "Polaris—of the Snows" and "Minos of Sardanes" is on the newsstands in the September issue.

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IN PLANDERS' WOOD

By

M. Ludington Cain

IN Planders' wood as sunset fades
The shadows quickly fill
The deep ravines, the mossy glades—
Even the owls are still . . .

No children come to Planders' wood
To gather flowers by day;
If there is breeze the solitude
Soon frightens it away—

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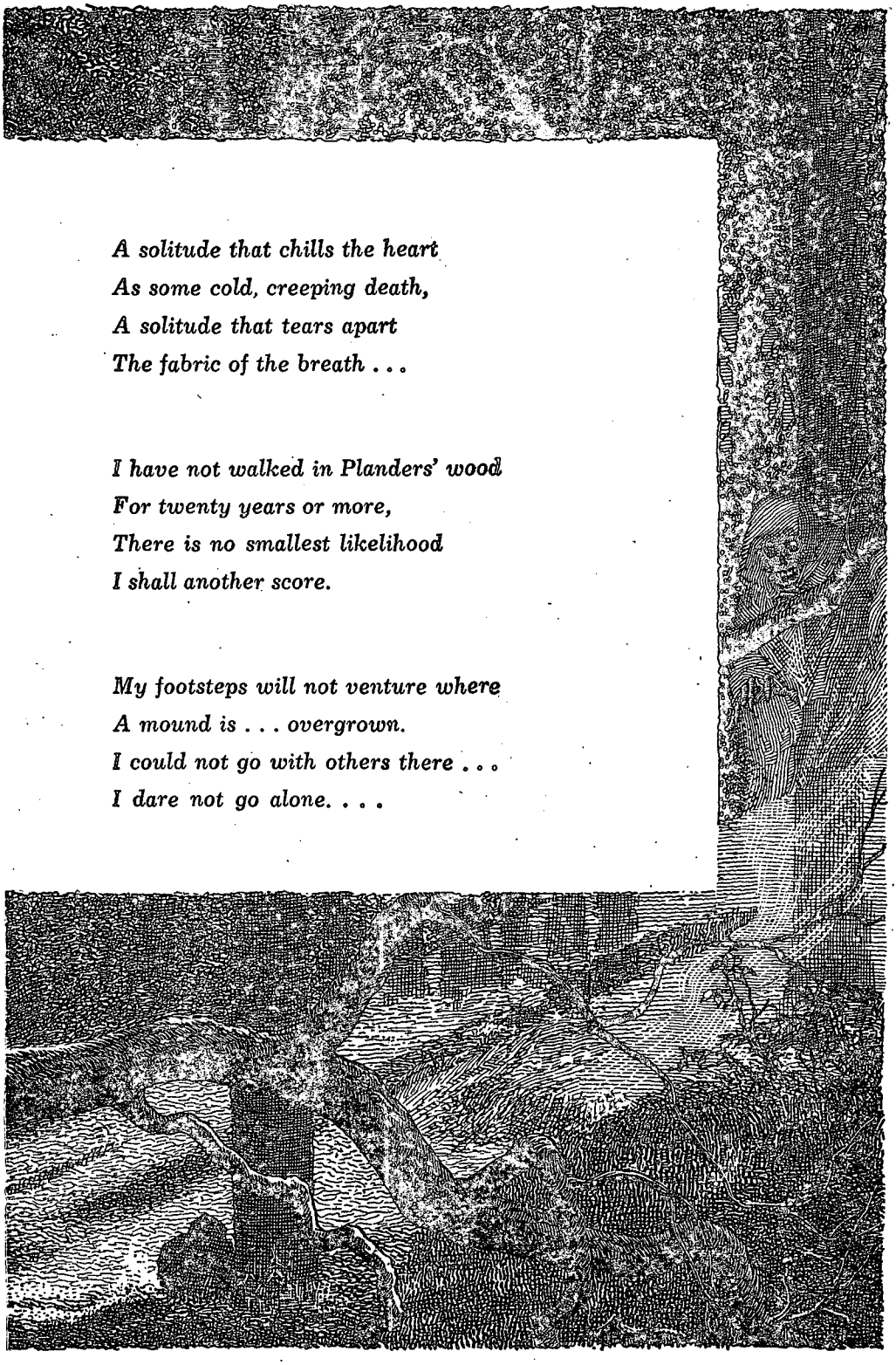

A solitude that chills the heart
As some cold, creeping death,
A solitude that tears apart
The fabric of the breath . . .

I have not walked in Planders' wood
For twenty years or more,
There is no smallest likelihood
I shall another score.

My footsteps will not venture where
A mound is . . . overgrown.
I could not go with others there . . .
I dare not go alone. . . .

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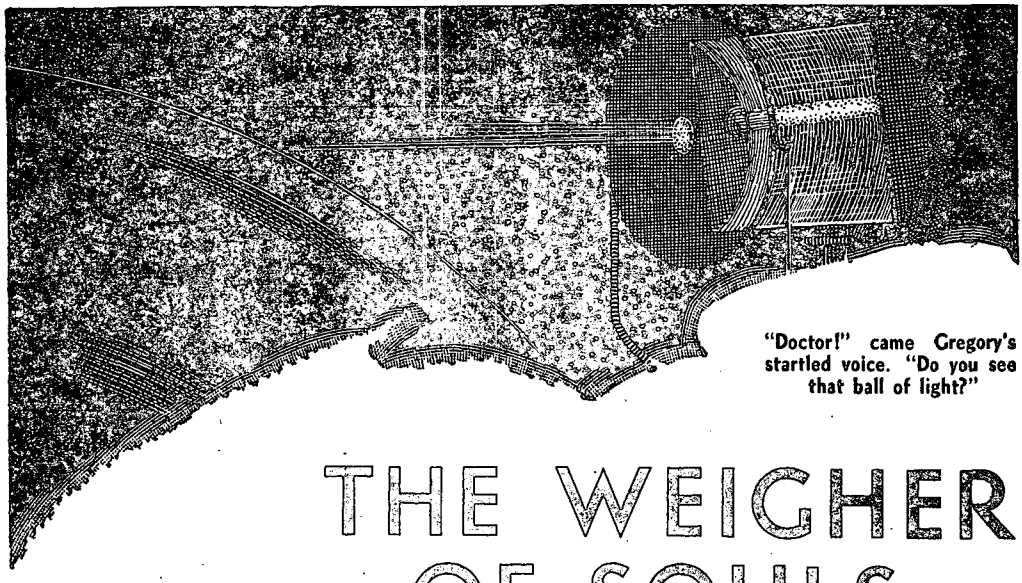

"Doctor!" came Gregory's startled voice. "Do you see that ball of light?"

THE WEIGHER OF SOULS

By André Maurois

Alone, he had dared to imprison the vital essence which is the soul—and alone must face the weird unbearable penalty of his deed.

CHAPTER I

I HAVE hesitated a long time before setting down this story. I am aware that it will astonish those who have been dearest to me, and be distasteful to more than one of them. Some will doubt my good faith, others my good sense. My own thoughts would have been the same had I not been the accidental, and protesting, eyewitness of the facts I am about to relate. So conscious am I of their apparent absurdity that I have never mentioned them even to my closest intimates. And if my mind is now made up to break this silence, it is because I do not feel that I have the right to leave to destruction after my own death the sole object remaining as evidence of this strange dream.

Before my readers reject Dr. James's theories as altogether improbable, I would ask them to recall what I believe to have been the extreme cautiousness of my mind. Like all men I have had my passions and weaknesses; I have tried to safeguard my judgment. In science, in metaphysics, in politics, and even in my sentimental life, I have made a point of never mistaking my wishes for proofs. I am far from having always succeeded, but perhaps that constant circumspection will be counted in my favor at a moment when I shall stand in every need of credence.

There is a second argument in my favor: the facts I have to narrate are surprising, but their nature is not impossible to verify. A few simple experiments, which can be easily repeated by any physicist, biologist or doctor, will show that James's theories, even if they are regarded as absurd, were based upon actual observations.

Why did I not continue these experiments myself? Why have I not made them known until after my death? It is not very easy for me to explain. The main factor, I think, was shyness, together with a natural distaste for occupying myself with certain problems. Circumstances had made me a writer, not a scientist. I had access to neither a hospital nor a laboratory. I was reluctant to get into touch with men to whom I was one of the profane, in order

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that I might draw their attention to phenomena which, as I knew, would contradict their ideas.

I regret my weakness, and I should be happy if the publication of this memoir were to inspire in some adventurous minds a desire to follow my hapless friend in the exploration of a new world, the knowledge of which might well lead to results of great significance.

I KNEW Dr. James during the war. We first met in a muddy Flanders field, and amidst a group of cheerful and healthy Englishmen his gaunt, prominent cheek bones and the look of torment on his face at once impressed me. He had been attached to the medical services of the division with which I served as French liaison officer. We immediately became friendly, and notwithstanding the horror of those days and scenes, the months which I spent in the Ypres Salient in his company left me with memories that might almost be termed enjoyable.

Between our two camp beds a biscuit case served as table and library. At night, when sleep was denied us by the shells screaming their way overhead toward Poperinghe and the clacking of the soaked canvas in the wind, we held muttered converse about madmen and poets. I liked my companion. Beneath his casing of cynicism I caught glimpses of the bold and tender spirit within. So reticent was he that I shared his daily life for months on end without knowing whether he had either wife or children.

The armistice cut short this friendship, as it did so many others. For a year we exchanged letters, and I thus learned that James was on the staff of one of the London hospitals. Then one of us (which, I couldn't now say) failed to answer a letter. James became an image still entangled with my memories, but an unreal image, like that of a character in a novel. And in the end I ceased to think about him, even in dream, until the spring of 1925.

During that year I had occasion to make a long stay in London for some researches at the British Museum. I was there alone, rather tired and depressed by too much continuous work. One morning the sunshine was so bright that I had not the courage to immure myself in the reading room. For a moment or two I stood watching the pigeons under the Greek colonnade of the museum, as friendly and as distant as those of Saint Mark's. I stood in a brown study. The realization was forced on me that solitude, healthy enough for a short time, was becoming intolerable. Yet I did not lack English friends—why hadn't I tried to look them up? Wouldn't it be pleasant to spend the evenings with such an intelligent fellow as Dr. James? I had forgotten his address, but it is never hard to trace a doctor; and entering the reading room, I discovered from a medical directory that H. B. James, M. D., was on the resident staff of Saint Barnaby's Hospital. I decided to drop my work for that morning, and to go and hunt up my friend.

Saint Barnaby's Hospital lies south of the Thames, in the crowded region that stretches beyond Blackfriars Bridge. To cross the river thereabouts always impresses me in a strange and compelling way. The Thames there is the frontier of two worlds. One leaves the Gothic and Renaissance London, the London of chessboard squares, of the tree-lined embankments beneath the great hotels, of the red stream of busses, for a city of factories and warehouses, bare walls, and blunt chimney stacks. And the contrast that morning struck me the more forcibly as, just when I was crossing the bridge, a great cloud suddenly obscured the sun.

In a gloomy, stormy light I reached the slime-covered bankside where men were loading stranded barges with sacks of cement. Along the thoroughfare roared the metallic din of tramcars and steam tractors. Alongside the pavement seethed a wretched street market. I was entering the territory of a different people.

A policeman told me how to reach Saint Barnaby's. Situated on the river's edge, the hospital seemed to me like a refuge amidst all the sordid houses and the blind walls of warehouses. Like so many London buildings, it resembled one of those edifices in romantic engravings, with long white streaks emphasizing the black violence of the shadows, but it was enlivened here and there by little splashes of vivid color—the green of turf, the lavender-blue uniform of a nurse, the bright red dressing gowns of three convalescents taking their first stroll. Above the iron gates a large streamer displayed an inscription to the effect that Saint Barnaby's was supported by voluntary contributions and that at the present moment there was a deficit of thirty thousand pounds. I entered and asked the porter whether Dr. H. B. James was attached to the hospital.

"Dr. James?" he said. "Certainly, sir.... At this time you'll probably find him in the residents' lodge. . . . Straight under

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the memorial arch, and first on your left.

I obeyed, and found a small detached block, likewise of smoke-blackened white stone, but covered with ivy and Virginia creeper. A board at the foot of the stairs showed the names of the doctors, each of them followed by the indication "In" or "Out." At the top of the list I read: "Dr. H. B. James, 1st Floor, Room 21. In."

I went up, and found my friend's name inscribed on the wooden plate of one of the doors. Then suddenly I felt anxious—in fact, almost shy. Would he be pleased at seeing me after such long oblivion? Should I merely find myself alone again, after a few polite remarks, in that dismal cluster of chimneys and slums? I knocked, and with an unconscious movement took hold of the door knob. It did not turn. It seemed to be held fast from within. A voice, that once-familiar grating voice that seemed torn by the wind from rusted scrap iron, came in what struck me as a dry tone:

"Just one moment, please."

IN THE ensuing silence I heard hasty footsteps, the noise of sliding rings from a hurriedly pulled curtain, a squeal rather like that of a small animal pinched or hit by mistake, and then a clinking of glasses being thrown against each other. Water flowed into a basin, gentle and irritating. Standing in front of the door I waited, vaguely uneasy. What was James doing? Had I interrupted some operation, a dressing, an examination? It seemed unlikely. James was not a surgeon, and in any case he would not have brought a patient to his own room. Was he rising late after being on night duty? Had I wakened him?

At last the water ceased, steps came toward me, the door knob turned beneath my hand, and through the half-opened door I saw the doctor's head. He was even more gaunt than during the war. His eyes, with deep hollows beneath the orbits, shone with a troubled and as it were veiled gleam; in the expression there was something haggard which I found extremely painful. For a moment he hesitated before picking on the exact memory that fitted his unexpected caller, then smiled and opened the door wide. I saw that he was wearing a white overall.

"Hullo, my boy! What the deuce are *you* doing in England? You're the last person I'd have expected to see this morning!"

The room was simply furnished: a camp bed, two chairs, a big leather armchair, and a few shelves, some laden with books, the rest hidden by a green canvas curtain, the same one, no doubt, that I had heard sliding on its rod. In one corner stood a hand basin full of soapy water. On the mantelpiece, several photographs of a young woman. James offered me the armchair and handed me a cigarette box, but he kept looking round with an air of such anxiety that I wondered if there could be a third person hidden in the room. Then he made an effort to talk, with just the air of feigned interest that might be assumed by one interrupted in some dubious occupation and trying to assume ease of manner.

"Well, well!" he said. "You certainly seem to have dropped me since you became an historian. . . . I read that last book of yours, although you didn't send it to me. . . . Not bad. I shouldn't have thought you had it in you. . . . But books apart, what's been happening to you?"

I had arrived full of pleasure at seeing again a man of whom I had been fond, a man, too, who had given me some of my keenest intellectual enjoyment. But I felt vexed and so ill at ease that my pleasure was completely spoiled. I saw that James and I had almost nothing to say to each other. We had known each other as members of a group which had long ceased to exist. Of our 1918 soul, nothing survived. Our common anguish regarding the outcome of the war, our common affection for wounded friends, were sentiments as dead as the superficial cells which had then formed our earthly framework.

To the self who had just entered this room, the James who dwelt there was a being almost as completely a stranger as any random passer-by I might have stopped in Piccadilly. I felt that the only way of again reaching the deeper and more stable layers in him was to confess my disappointment.

"It's an odd thing, James," I said, "but do you remember an evening of ours at Ypres when you told me about the dissociation of personality in madness? I feel something very like that at this moment! I came to your room to find a Self which no longer exists, and I am vainly longing for the moment of madness that might allow me to be pleased at seeing you. . . ."

Such a remark would have sufficed to rouse the James I had once known to a discourse at once learned and humorous. But he shrugged his shoulders wearily, lit a cigarette, and sank into one of the chairs, still looking anxiously round.

"Ah, well!" he sighed. "It's a long time

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since I gave up worrying about dissociations and sublimations. . . . I look after people with cancer and heart disease and lung troubles. . . . The Port of London occasionally sends me compatriots of yours, seamen. . . ."

At that instant, from behind the green curtain, there came a sound that is never forgotten by any who have heard it—the scampering of a rat, a swift, dry sound accentuated by the hard claws of the feet. Suddenly I had visions of a dug-out which I once shared with James in a railway cutting.

"Hullo!" I said laughingly. "Do you keep rats? That's something to stir up common memories for us!"

"Rats?" he said, rising with a look of displeasure. "How do you suppose there would be rats in a hospital? You're suffering from hallucinations, my boy. . . . I say, I'm awfully sorry, but we can't stay here. . . . It's time for me to go round my wards. Would you like to come with me? It might interest you."

I was now definitely embarrassed.

"Are you sure I shan't be in the way?" I said. "I can easily come back some other time."

"No," he answered, in a tone of mingled good will and irony. "No, you aren't in my way now. . . ."

He stepped quickly over to the sink, and taking a little soapy water, wiped a red smear from the edge of the basin.

SAINT BARNABY'S HOSPITAL struck me as one of the least gloomy that could be imagined. The floors of the wards were tiled in black-and-white squares, the red beds were trimly ranged, the windows had their flowers; and oases of healthy freshness were set in this realm of sickness by the nurses, almost all of them pretty and kindly, in their blue print dresses. Each ward was ruled over by a ward sister, recognizable by the deeper blue of her belt.

"Nothing to report, sister?" James asked.

"I'd like you to have a look at number two sixteen, doctor. The fever's not going down. . . ."

He went over to the bed. Turning over the case sheet hung above the patient's head, he made an effort to remember the history of the illness, and ordered a change of treatment in a mournful, tired voice. In the women's ward, I was struck by his indifference. In myself, the sight of a sick woman (especially if she be young and pleasing) has always inspired an ardent sense of pity. I realized that a doctor entering these rooms would not, as I did, experience a sensation at once agonizing and grateful, a feeling of invaded intimacy and melting compassion; yet it surprised me to see how insensitive my companion was to the little blandishments of some of these dying women. There was one girl, deathly pale under her long, loosened hair, who attempted a smile as we passed, only to fall back upon her pillow, gasping for breath.

"Poor child!" I said to James.

"Which?" he said. "Oh, yes . . . three eighteen. No hope for her. . . ."

In the male wards, several patients were out of bed, standing grouped in their red jackets round the beds or the flower laden tables. There was a dock strike in progress at the time, and many of the patients were slightly injured men who stood there arguing politics and religion amongst themselves in the weighty tone of Hyde Park orators. I saw my friend's eyes soften as he spoke to one strikingly handsome lad of fifteen.

"Is that you, sonny?" he said. "No more giddiness? You can go out tomorrow. . . . Anything to report, sister?"

"I don't think four thirteen will get through the night, doctor. He doesn't open his eyes any longer."

James went over to a corner bed where an old man was lying. His thin cheeks and nostrils seemed to be sucked in toward the inside of his body. He was breathing very fast. His ruddy-white beard had not been shaved for several days. James took the sick man's pulse; he was unconscious and showed no reaction.

"You're right, sister," he said with sudden animation. "He won't last the night. . . . I'll warn Gregory. Don't bother about anything. . . . In any case, I'll come in and see him during the day. Get him a little camphorated oil; it will keep him going until the evening."

I was taken aback by this sudden change in my friend. His excitement now seemed to equal his previous indifference.

"I must go and see the post-mortem clerk," he said. "Come along with me; that will interest you."

"What is the post-mortem clerk?" I asked.

"Forgotten your Latin? He's the assistant responsible for seeing to the autopsy of the corpse after a patient dies. Ours is a queer little man called Gregory."

We went down three flights of stairs. James pushed back a heavy door laden with bolts, and we entered an amphi-

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theater capable of holding about twenty onlookers, the white walls coated with a shiny varnish, and with four dissecting tables in the center. The air was impregnated with an unpleasant smell of formaldehyde.

I gave a start when a small figure of a man seemed to rise with diabolic abruptness from the middle of the amphitheater. He repelled me from my first glimpse of him. And yet his appearance was quite commonplace, the points of his waxed mustache twisting spirally up toward his gold-rimmed glasses. When James mentioned this clerk of the corpses I had imagined, for some reason or other, a sort of romantic executioner; and I was shocked by this polite, tradesmanlike vulgarity in conjunction with the idea of death.

"Morning, Gregory," said the doctor. "This is a French friend of mine who is going over the hospital. . . . I came in to warn you that we shall certainly have number four thirteen tonight."

"Very good, doctor," said the little man. "I'll come this evening. Everything will be ready. Ten o'clock?"

"Yes, about ten," said James. "A little earlier if you can."

"And by the way, doctor," asked Gregory in a lowered voice, "you aren't forgetting that you owe me for the last two?"

James looked all round with the same anxious glance that had surprised me in his room, and taking two notes from his wallet he handed them to Gregory. The latter eyed me through his spectacles.

"Perhaps," he said, slowly folding the notes, "the French gentleman would like to see our installation?"

I murmured some unintelligible remark. The smell of this room was beginning to give me qualms, and I was afraid of making myself look foolish by fainting.

"Our organization," the little man went on complacently, "enables us to deal, in this room and that next door, with as many as eight corpses daily. It is quite enough—except in midsummer, because the babies crowd me up, then. . . . And yet, sir, with methodical handling, even in the busy season, I can keep up . . . can't I, doctor? I've done as many as four on the same table. . . . Hard work, I can tell you! No, no, don't go this way out, sir. You haven't seen the best. . . ."

He turned toward the iron door let into the varnished wall, on which a notice was pasted: "Professor Simpson wishes to have hearts intact. The greatest care must be taken." Bolts creaked. Slowly the door turned. I was caught by a sense of mortal chill. I must have been rather pale, for James took my arm and gave me a close look. Going down a few steps, we reached a large, brick-walled cellar. In the center of the refrigerating room stood a metal apparatus which looked like a baker's oven, a boiler, or more exactly, with its long projecting rods, a gigantic waffle iron. Gregory gave me a glance, signed to me with an air of hidden understanding as if he were on the point of giving me a wonderful present, and then, with remarkable agility, opened two doors and pulled one of the rods. I almost cried out loud, for he had drawn forward to where we stood a long platform on which lay a woman, covered up to her shoulders by a sheet.

How lovely she was, that dead creature! I shall never forget the unearthly whiteness of that face. Her eyes were closed. A sad, lofty smile gave shape to a delicious mouth. How had such a woman come to die in an outlying hospital? One would have liked to know her, to console her, to help her. . . . Gregory and James stood motionless, eying me.

"Do you recognize her, doctor?" said Gregory. "It's that Russian girl. . . . They're waiting for the relatives to claim her. . . ."

He pushed back the rod with an abrupt jerk, thrusting platform and body into the black metal machine, and said with an air of pride:

"We can keep them indefinitely in this cold. . . . Would you like to see a man?"

"No, thanks," I said. "I'd like to get outside."

James took my arm again, kindly.

"I'll take you up to my room," he said, "and you shall have a glass of port. You don't look well. . . . And look, Gregory—is that fixed for this evening?"

At that moment a muffled bell sounded in the amphitheater: *tak-tak . . . tak-tak-tak-tak. . . .*

"Two-four," said Gregory. "That's for you, doctor."

"Excuse me," said James, "I must leave you for a moment. . . . Yes, we all have our own signals on these bells. Mine is two-four. . . . There are bells like that in every ward and in our rooms too. . . . All I have to do now is to telephone to the lodge, and they'll tell me where I'm needed. . . . You wait here for me."

"I'd rather see you somewhere else, doctor. Will you dine with me tonight? I'm staying in a delightful little hotel in the city. . . ."

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"Tonight?" he murmured absently. . . . "Tonight? Yes, at a pinch, I can get someone to take my place. . . . I, too, should very much like to have a talk. Only you heard just now—I must be back at ten o'clock. If you're willing to dine early, about seven, I can come."

"I'll expect you . . . Johnson's Hotel. . . ."

High up in the amphitheater the buzzer was repeating, *tak-tak, tak-tak-tak-tak.*

THE proprietor of Johnson's Hotel prided himself on having installed neither central heating nor electric light; but a huge fire of logs blazed in the hall fireplace, silver candlesticks gleamed on the dining-room table, the servants were silent and respectful, and the visitor felt that to them he was not a number but a man. I asked the head waiter to give me for this dinner the small private dining room; I liked its light oak paneling, and on coming in about seven o'clock, I was struck by a sense of surprising intimacy. On the mahogany of the table a vase of jonquils shone in the soft light of the candles. When James arrived a moment later, I noticed with pleasure that he too responded to the charming simplicity of the setting.

"Ah!" he said, standing warming his hands in front of the fire. "It takes a Frenchman to discover corners of old England in the middle of London. What a good idea of yours! I needed a rest so badly. . . . Strictly speaking, I don't deal with the out-patients, but the list is so heavy on Mondays that I give my colleagues a hand if I can."

"Why are there more patients on Monday?"

"Oh, that's easy enough! In our poor districts, Monday is the day when the rent-collector calls for the week's money. The women contrive not to be at home, and so as to have an excuse they bring their children along to us. You ought to see that some day; it's incredible! Some of them leave their brats on the benches and go for a drink at the pub opposite. After the consultation they have to be found and brought back, all drowsy with beer, and made to pick out one from the kids who've been left behind. . . . Besides, there are the Sunday accidents, fights, and of course my own patients. . . . It's a stiff day."

"Sit down, James. . . . We'll try to put the hospital out of your mind. Do you remember that Burgundy we used to drink at Amiens? I've ordered you the very same."

Wartime memories occupied us during the soup, and then James retired into an impregnable taciturnity. I remembered that he used often to emerge from such fits of abstraction with one of those dazzling, paradoxical speeches which had made me like him. So I remained silent myself, and waited.

"Tell me," he said suddenly. "There's one question I've never asked you . . . even at times when it would have been very natural. Do you believe in the immortality of the soul?"

I was a little surprised, but quite pleased, for in this abrupt exordium I once more saw the James of my memories. I reflected for a moment.

"What a question!" I said. "You know, or rather you used to know, what my metaphysical 'position' is. . . . I believe I can see in nature the traces of an order, a plan—the reflection of divinity, if you like. . . . But the plan itself seems to me to be unintelligible to a human mind. . . . To answer you, then, I can fall back on no traditional doctrines. All I can honestly say is that I have never come across any visible sign of the survival of souls. . . . But to declare as a fact that the soul dies with the body, strikes me as equally rash."

"You're very canny!" he said impatiently. "It is impossible that one of these hypotheses should not seem to you more probable than the other. . . . Do you live as if you believed or as if you did not believe in another life?"

"I certainly live as if I did not believe in a Day of Judgment; but that doesn't prove that I am sure of the non-immortality of the soul. It proves that I don't believe in the severity of a God who must at the same time be our Creator. . . . But if you give me a moment or two to think, I feel I can find arguments in favor of the hypothesis that the soul dies with the body. . . . Thought without body? It seems inconceivable. . . . Don't you think so?

"Our thinking is a tissue of images and sensations. . . . Sensations cease with the sentient organs, and the rebirth of images is bound up with the existence of a nervous system. . . .

"You know better than I do how certain physical deterioration of the brain cells causes an alteration, even a suppression, of personality. . . . It was you yourself who taught me that a man's thoughts can be transformed by the injection of certain glandular products. . . .

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All this shows a very strong link between the physical basis of our thinking and the thought itself. . . . And then, after all, there is syncope. . . . Do you remember, James, the day when my horse fell on me, in Flanders somewhere, and you found me unconscious in the meadow? I had been there for two hours, and I remembered nothing. . . . It did not look as if my soul had been living while my body was annihilated."

"That looks very poor reasoning to me," said the doctor, in a harsh, sarcastic voice. "I grant you that in your swoon you ceased for a period to be conscious of your personality. (Yet that is going a long way, for there are many patients who come round from a faint or an anaesthetic and remember extraordinary scenes, and sometimes describe the impressions of a soul set free.) But that your personality was annihilated, the very fact of your awakening totally disproves. . . . When you got up after your tumble from your horse, you weren't a different man—you were the same man. . . .

"If this experience proves anything, it would rather be that your personality was able to survive when your body had seemingly deserted it. . . . But we can imagine better. Nowadays, when a heart stops beating and lungs stop breathing, we doctors say that the patient is dead. . . . Very good. . . . But suppose that means were found (and it's not at all improbable that they may be) for inducing a circulation of new blood in the dead man's head. Will not the man live again?"

"I don't know. . . . " I paused to think. "It's possible."

"If he is reborn, will it be with the same or a different personality?"

"The same, of course."

"Then we're agreed. . . . But where will that personality come from? Will you maintain that it is suddenly formed, with all its vast landscape of memories, with its passions and sentiments, in that newly reborn body? Or is it the dead man's old soul? And if the latter, are you not thereby granting that it did *not* die with the body?"

"Why, James? If our memories are linked with a definite structure of the brain, and if that structure has not altered, the memories are reborn identical. . . . To use a rough-and-ready image, but one that will give you some notion of my thought, it is as if you said, 'The ministry is empty all night, isn't it? And yet when the clerks come back in the morning, they will busy themselves with the same matters. Therefore, the ministry has a personal soul which dwells there invisibly during the night.'"

"AN INGENIOUS sophism!" said the doctor, as he poured out some wine. "But it has no substance. . . . For you're presupposing that the brain contains the outline of its images and memories just as the ministry contains its files. . . . Well, you must allow me my opinion as a doctor that we possess no proof at all of any such organization of the brain. The idea of cerebral localization is less and less favored by the specialists, and even were it true, it would not prove your assertion. . . . No, the more one studies the structure of the brain, the stronger is one's impression that it is, as your countryman Bergson says, a system of communication, a telephone exchange between the body and something else. Naturally, if you destroy the exchange your communication ceases, but that doesn't prove that the interlocutor never existed, nor that he vanished with the instruments. . . ."

"Quite so, James. But in the case of the telephone exchange, I believe in the interlocutor because a simple experiment will enable me to trace him by proceeding to him in the flesh, on foot, on horseback, or by air. Who has ever traced this soul interlocutor of yours? Can you give me a single instance of thought without a corporeal basis?"

"Why certainly! You must see that if the body, the first cell, the first perceptible particle of protoplasm, were not preceded by a 'vital force,' a 'creative thought,' matter would never have been organized into a living body. . . . After all, it is rather surprising that you yourself should have formed a *body*, the body I see before me now, with carbon, oxygen, phosphorus, and a few other insentient elements. . . . And it's still more surprising that you thus constructed a man, rather than a bear or a shrimp. . . . Where was the material basis of the thought from which you were born? From what brain were transmitted the inherited thoughts and ancestral images that make you *You*?"

"Are you talking seriously, James? Don't you believe simply that this material basis was within the fertilized cell from which my body sprang? Biology is not my strong point, but. . . ."

"I can't help smiling!" he said. "Where have you seen any scientific proof, my

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dear fellow, that your body and mind were prefigured in a certain cell thirty-five years ago? You said just now, 'I believe in the interlocutor because a simple experiment will enable me to trace him.' . . . But in this case, what experiment have you made? What allows you to imagine that to enlarge a cell to a gigantic scale, beyond the power of any microscope, would enable you to discover in it the nose of your great-grandfather, or the puritanism of mine? And if you really believe so, do you think that such a belief is scientific? That would be a great mistake. . . . That notion, if you have it, is a religion, neither more nor less proven than another, surprising only in a man who has just been declaring himself emancipated from any doctrine. . . .

"I know very well that the nineteenth century strained every nerve to reduce the spiritual to terms of the material. But it failed. Observation in no way proves that the mental, the sentimental, life is contained within the material life, but on the contrary, that the former supplements the latter with a whole unexplored domain. . . ."

The plump, pink head waiter brought in our coffee. He looked pained. Guests at Johnson's, I dare say, did not usually argue heatedly on the immortality of the soul. I held my peace. James's arguments left me somewhat embarrassed. I offered him a cigarette, and for some time he smoked in silence.

"All the same," I said at last, "all the same. . . . Try the *reductio ad absurdum*, James. . . . Supposing that each single one of us has an immortal soul, where the deuce would the billions be who have lived? Where would the millions of billions go who have still to live? Where are the souls of brute beasts? If you were a theologian, you'd say they hadn't any. But you're a naturalist. Where are the souls of all the porpoises and kangaroos and crabs that ever existed! Don't you find such an idea inconceivable?"

"If I were a theologian, as you say, I should probably reply that those numbers which terrify you are as nothing in the sight of an all-powerful and infinite God. . . . But you're talking now of an eternal survival of all personalities. I'm not asking so much as that. Can't you imagine that every living body might have attached to itself a certain quantity of a force, the nature of which is unknown to us, but which, for convenient reference, we may term the 'vital fluid'? What's to prevent us from thinking that after death this 'fluid' returns to a kind of common stock? Why shouldn't there be a principle of the conservation of life, analogous to that of the conservation of energy? Grant me that, and I shall say I'm satisfied."

"Satisfied? But my dear James, why do you attach all this importance to such frail hypotheses?"

"That, my friend," he said, rising, "I shall explain to you in an hour's time, if you will do me the favor of coming back with me to the hospital."

CHAPTER II

WHILST we had been dining, a thick fog had come down over the streets. The gleaming headlights of invisible cars planted it with rings of red and white light. Ludgate Circus was a landscape of nightmares. James bade me take his arm and guided me toward a bus. He had not spoken a word since leaving the hotel. When we were seated, I turned to him.

"What are we going to see?" I asked.

"Nothing, perhaps. . . . You shall judge for yourself. . . . But in any case, you must realize that you're the first person to whom I am revealing my researches. . . . Besides, you'll understand. . . . But I'd rather not talk in here," he added, casting a hostile glance toward a lady in mourning who was sitting beside me.

The bus crossed the river in the midst of a veritable bank of yellow cotton wool. Factory fires on that baleful shore gleamed vast and pale through the flocculent gloom. The vibration of the bus made me drowsy.

"We get off here," said Dr. James abruptly.

We were in front of Saint Barnaby's. The lights of the hospital shone feebly in the enveloping cloud. With the sure movements of a man on his own ground, James led me across the quadrangles and under archways, and in a moment or two I recognized the iron door of the mortuary. For some time I had felt sure it was there that he was bringing me, and in spite of myself, I shuddered. My companion's nervous state seemed to be one of violent overexcitement. With what macabre exhibition did he propose to round off our evening? The door was shut and bolted, and James knocked once, then twice quickly.

"I'm here, doctor," came the insufferable voice of Gregory from inside.

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I was annoyed with myself for my uneasiness, and could not overcome it. As a matter of fact, looking back on it in cool blood, I can now hardly find an explanation of its intensity. I had found this man Gregory distastful, but I had no reason to think that he was anything but a harmless laboratory assistant. My acquaintance with James was of old standing, and nothing I knew of him could fail to fill me with confidence. True, he had greatly changed since the war, and I was not quite confident of his being in his right mind. But what could I have to fear? The sight of death? The years between 1914 and 1918 had accustomed me to that. Was I being made an unwilling accomplice? But an accomplice in what crime? I strained every nerve to make that effort at self-command which one made, ten years before, when a bombardment began, and I crossed the threshold, resolved on firmness.

"Good evening, doctor," said Gregory.

Then he noticed my presence. He looked surprised, and, I thought, rather put out.

"Hullo, you've brought some one along, doctor?" he said.

And taking James aside, he whispered a few words which I could not hear.

"It makes no difference," said James out loud. "My friend is a Frenchman, a total stranger to the hospital, and a loyal friend of mine throughout the war. He will hold his tongue."

"I hope so," said Gregory, "I certainly hope so. . . . We'd both lose our positions, doctor, if the gentleman did any talking."

"All right, all right—I tell you he won't," answered James impatiently. "Have you got the man?"

Stepping aside, Gregory opened the dissecting table to our view. I then saw that a body was lying on it, with its head flung back, and I recognized the man with the ruddy-white beard I had seen that morning in his death agony. I had been wrong in taking him for an old man. Sickness had left marks of wear on his face, but the body was youthful, handsome, and muscular, and in the pitiful limpness of death left one with a cruel impression of wasted vigor. The left thigh was tattooed with a device of two entwined serpents, and the chest displayed a bark with swelling sails.

"We're late," said James. "This fog. . . . How long has he been there?"

"The last breath was about nine-forty, doctor. . . . And it's ten-thirty now."

"That's all right," said the doctor. "There's a chance yet. . . . Quick, Gregory, the weighing-machine. . . ." And turning to me, he added, "Sit down on one of those benches. . . . Don't move; and not a word. . . . I'll explain later what you'll have seen. . . ."

Gregory had vanished under the tiers of seats. He returned bearing an apparatus which I identified, when he set it up, as a weighing-machine with a dial and pointer on top, very much like those to be seen in railway-stations. Its platform was large enough to support an outstretched human body. With James's help the assistant laid the corpse of the red-headed man on it, and fixed a small mirror at the tip of the pointer. Then, diving once more beneath the benches, he brought up a cylinder mounted on a fairly tall upright support. I heard a spring being turned. No doubt he was winding up some piece of clockwork mechanism.

"Make haste, Gregory, make haste!" said the doctor impatiently. "Are you ready? I'll put the light out. . . ."

He turned a switch. All the lights in the amphitheater went out. And I then saw that a luminous ray, reflected by the mirror fixed to the point of the needle, struck the cylinder, which was slowly revolving. By this means, any movement of the pointer was matched by the much more extensive movement of a luminous point on the cylinder. It was the classic method which I had seen used long ago, in the physiology class, to augment the sensitiveness of a galvanometer.

I understood nothing of the experiment I was witnessing, but the scene had assumed a scientific, and therefore familiar, aspect, which reassured me. I was now alive to its curious beauty. The blackness, that feebly gleaming ray, that body vaguely outlined in the dark, James's face picked out for an instant by the ray—it all recalled those pictures of Rembrandt's wherein the philosopher, the alchemist, toils in the brown shadows relieved only by a yellow light from the narrow, unearthly windows. For a few minutes the silence was complete, and then James's voice came out from the darkness.

"Are you beginning to grasp?" it said. "You gathered, of course, that the luminous spot on the cylinder indicates the weight of the body. . . . Well, now look at the two phosphorescent marks showing the top and bottom of the cylinder. You see how the ray's point of impact is slowly dropping—the weight is diminishing. . . . The weight of a corpse always diminishes

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during the hours following death. . . . Why so? That's easy to understand. Part of the moisture contained in the tissues is lost by slow evaporation, and there is no nutrition to replace it. . . . Observe that this drop is continuous, as you can see by noting that the luminous point falls steadily, and in fact there seems no reason why such evaporation should be anything but regular. . . . It is about an hour now since death took place. For half an hour more, within a few minutes, this phenomenon will continue without any change. After that you must watch the cylinder very closely."

There followed an extraordinary stillness. I could hear James and Gregory breathing. Slowly the luminous point kept sinking, and there this man lay, he who doubtless had once, to a wife and children, been the center of the world, now stretched on a metal platform, the object of an incomprehensible experiment. High up in the amphitheater the buzzer sounded—*tak-tak-tak, tak-tak.* . . .

"Twenty-five past one," said James, in a tone which again made me aware of the extraordinary nervous tension he had shown earlier in the night.

I kept my eyes glued to the cylinder. I could distinctly hear the tick of a chronometer, which James no doubt was holding.

"One-thirty," he said.

A few seconds later I saw the spot of light drop sharply. The jump was very small, but easy to detect.

"Did you see, James?" I exclaimed.

"I've seen better things than that," said the sarcastic voice. "I didn't bring you here merely to observe *that* phenomenon."

And with that he turned on the lights again. Slightly dazzled, I saw once again Gregory's waxed mustache, and the ruddy man lying there in one of those limp, clumsy positions assumed by corpses.

My calm had returned. I felt interested and curious; I had glimpses of what my friend was seeking. I felt passionately anxious to know his own interpretation of his experiment.

"Now you'll explain," I said.

"Wait," he answered me. "I must let Gregory get to bed. . . . Come up to my room, and I'll let you see something else. . . . Thanks, Gregory. I'll be seeing you tomorrow."

"Shall I keep the heart for Professor Simpson tomorrow?" said the little man politely, taking the dead body in his arms to put it back on the dissecting table.

"Who cares about hearts?" said James, with a shrug. "Yes, of course. Just do what they told you."

And taking my arm, he led me away.

"WELL, James?" I asked, when he had settled me in his solitary armchair, with a whisky on my right and a cigarette box on my left.

"Well, my friend, I suppose you're expecting me to explain this session to you. . . . But first I should like to know what you yourself think of the things you've just seen."

"I? Well, what am I to say? Our talk during dinner, and the experiment I've just witnessed, seem to me to prove that you are in pursuit of—what shall I say?—of the human soul. . . . And also that, believing in the spirit, you are seeking it by material means. . . . Which, if you will excuse me seems a contradiction. . . . But I'm wrong to pass judgment, as I don't even know what experiments you have made apart from this evening's. So it is up to you to talk and start off."

He was standing leaning against the mantelpiece. He lit up his pipe. Behind the green curtain a galloping of sharp claws sounded along a wooden board.

"James, tell me the truth. Those *are* rats, aren't they?"

"'How now! A rat?'" he said with a smile. . . . "I must take you to see 'Hamlet' again. . . . There's a new batch just now . . . . But we'll talk of rats all in good time. . . . Let's get back to men. . . . To begin with, I want to answer your first objection. You tell me that I'm seeking the spirit in the form of matter. But that's not quite right. . . . I am not seeking the spirit. I am seeking a certain form of energy which, when linked up with matter, will endow matter with that still unexplained property—life. . . . You will grant me, I think, that notwithstanding the claims of fanatical materialists, it has hitherto proved impossible to reproduce the reactions of living matter by any physical or chemical process. . . ."

"True. But there is a supposition that some day they will be explained. . . ."

"Oh, if you like!" he said impatiently. "One can suppose anything. . . . But there again, that is no longer science, but religion. . . . In any case, you will grant me that, scientifically or experimentally, I am entitled to say that we do not know what life is. . . . So there is no absurdity in seeking, as I am doing, the existence in living bodies of a form of energy different from all forms familiar to us. Observe, pray,

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that this search does not raise the problem of the soul in the religious or philosophic sense of the word; it transposes it, shifts it, sets it further back. . . . Even if I succeeded in proving that in every living being there does exist a definite mass of 'vital fluid,' allowance would still have to be made, within that fluid itself, for spirit and matter, and then one would have to show how they are united. . . . I mention that in case any orthodoxy may make you distrustful *a priori*. . . ."

"My dear James," I said. "I have made my point of view in this connection quite clear, and I am listening in a critical but perfectly free spirit. . . . In any case, your idea of vital fluid is not a new one. Mesmer, who was one of the remoter causes of the French Revolution, had . . . ."

"I know, I know," said the doctor, pulling at his pipe. "What's more, he had a much more important successor, whom I dare say you know nothing about—the Baron von Reichenbach."

"You're right. I know nothing of him. Who was he?"

"He was an extraordinary character, put out of the way by the French police because he wanted to found a state. . . . A great chemist—it was he who discovered paraffin and creosote. . . . About eighteen sixty he attacked the problem of the radiation of living bodies. He was the owner of several fairy-tale castles in Bavaria, some perched on mountains, others set beside lakes. And there he assembled subjects of peculiar sensitivity, people who could perceive in total darkness, around men and animals and flowers, a luminous fluid to which Reichenbach had given the name 'od,' from a Sanscrit term meaning 'all-penetrating.'

"Reichenbach's subjects, in total darkness, saw emanations rising from bodies; they were neither smoke nor vapor, but resembled a sustained flickering. . . . A curious detail was that these emanations were reddish in color for the right side of the body, and bluish for the left. . . . As a matter of fact, I have tried to repeat Reichenbach's experiments. But I never found anything. When the three of us, you and Gregory and myself, were in total darkness just now, you didn't detect any 'odic flickering,' did you? And yet we were all in a state of extreme hyperaesthesia at the time."

"No, I saw nothing."

"And round the corpse?"

"Nothing."

"Nor did I. And it has always been the same. . . . But I have found something else. . . . This is how it was. . . . I once read an account, in a medical paper during the war, of an experiment made by a certain Dr. Crooks. He described how he had weighed the corpses of animals, and had observed that, after a period approximately regular in a given species, there was an abrupt drop in weight. . . . In man, he reckoned this fall as averaging seventeen-hundredths of a milligram. From which he concluded that the soul does exist, and that it weighs seventeen-hundredths of a milligram. . . . In that crude form the communication was regarded as absurd. The said Crooks was put down as a madman, and nobody read his paper with care. . . .

"For my own part, his account struck me by its sincerity of tone and by its remarkable precision in details. . . . All the same, I would never have tried repeating these troublesome and unpleasant experiments if—" (He broke off as if he regretted having started that sentence, and went on without concluding it.) "Last year, as circumstances and hospital routine placed corpses at my disposal, it occurred to me to verify the facts registered by Crooks; and with some surprise I discovered that he had told the truth. . . . Only, he had stopped the experiment too soon. In man the normal curve of evaporation is almost always interrupted, not once, but three times by sudden falls. . . . The first, which you have observed tonight, takes place about one hour and thirty-five minutes after death, and is between fifteen and nineteen-twentieths of a milligram; the second and third, which I did not wait for because I now know them all too certainly, follow the first at intervals of twenty minutes and one hour respectively. . . . Were you going to say something?"

"Nothing important . . . a mere comment. As you can never place your bodies on the scales except some minutes after death, you do not know, James, whether a phenomenon of the same category may not have taken place during those few minutes."

He reflected for a moment, and then said:

"Quite true. But I come back to what I know. . . . Regarding the results of the experiment, no doubt is possible. . . . You have just seen them for yourself, everybody can verify them. . . . Let me add that I have repeated them with animals—whence the rats which intrigued you. And

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there, too, Crook's results are correct. There is always a sharp drop, but its extent is very much less than in man. . . . In the case of a rat, it is so faint that it cannot be measured. . . . Such are the facts; the interpretation, of course, admits of argument. . . ."

His pipe had gone out. He relit it and looked at me. I was careful to say nothing. He continued:

"At this stage, this is what I put forward. It seems to me possible to suggest, not that the soul weighs seventeen-hundredths of a miligram, which would be oversimple, but that every living creature is animated (in your language you could almost say *'âmé'*) by a certain form of energy, still unknown, which leaves the body after death. That all energy possesses mass is something admitted by the post-Einstein physicists. You know that light can be weighed, and that theoretically light could be compressed in a receptacle. . . . Well, why not vital energy likewise?

"True, the weight of light is of a different order of size, something infinitely smaller than what we are observing here. But I don't see why that should be an argument against me. It merely proves that we are in the presence of a quite different phenomenon, which is not surprising. . . . States of matter are now known of such a kind that a ton of atoms reduced to their kernels could find room in my waistcoat pocket. . . . Do you follow me thus far, or do you think I'm quite crazy?"

"I FIND it very hard to accustom myself to these ideas," I replied, "but your argument there is clear to me. . . . However, I will raise one objection. You apparently regard a human body as a living unity; but so far as we know, it is nothing of the kind. The different cells of the body don't all die at the same time. A heart lives longer than a brain. When I was in America I was shown in Carrel's laboratories how heart cells can be kept alive almost indefinitely by artificial means. I cannot remember the name of the scientist who once said that the cells of a body die like the inhabitants of a starving city—the weakest first. But if death is a series of stages, how is that idea to be linked with that of your sudden drops?"

"A very reasonable point. I had considered that myself. . . . The answer is, first, that I observe not one drop, but several; and then, that your idea of the individual death of cells is a hypothesis, but no more than a hypothesis. . . . If there does exist a certain force which may be the basis of what we call 'personality,' it is bound to disappear all at one time—doubtless at the instant of the heaviest fall; nevertheless, the personality of one of us is something quite distinct from the life of each of our cells. . . . A personality either exists, or does not exist. . . . Remember again, I have no wish to make the soul something material; but, as I explained just now, just as the soul is linked with the body for the expression of its thoughts, and the perception of its sensations, so it is likewise possible that after quitting the body, it should be linked with this mysterious energy which we have just noted in the act of departure."

"You mean that personality could survive the body, if the vital energy of that body could remain grouped in one single place?"

"Exactly. But for the moment I make no affirmations. . . . I merely say it is not inconceivable."

"But in actual fact this energy does not remain grouped."

"We don't know at all, but, as I said when we were dining, just as the matter from which a body is made up returns under various forms to universal matter, so, at the moment of death, our vital force returns to some vast reservoir of spiritual energy until such time as, reunited to certain atoms of matter, it once more animates a living being."

"In other words, you believe in an immortality of the universal soul, but not in the survival of the individual?"

"You have the real French taste for ideas, *mon ami*. . . . At the moment, you are drawing me into the field of hypothesis, and that has no bounds. . . . For my own part, the problem interesting me is much more restricted. . . . If one could gather up the vital energy of a human being, would one thereby have fixed his personality? Would that assure him, if not of immortality (all problems involving infinity surpass the human mind), at least of some measure of survival? That is what I am trying to find out."

"A little crazy, James—but interesting. . . . Well, what next? Have you tried to gather up this 'something' that weighs seventeen-hundreds of a milligram?"

"I have not yet found a means of trying it with a man. . . . I have tried it with animals. During the weighing-machine experiment, I have placed certain animals

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underneath glass bell jars—but what did I collect in them? Did they even collect anything? I have never been able to say. In the first place, I am obliged to lift the bell jar in order to withdraw the animal. Do its contents thereupon escape? I simply don't know. . . . Notwithstanding Reichenbach and his assertions, the vital fluid remains invisible; and that doesn't make observations easy. . . . Obviously experiments made with humans ought to give results more readily observed, as the quantities involved are greater. Three days ago I ordered a glass bell jar of a size large enough to cover the body of a man. I shall have it next week. . . . We'll see. . . . Are you likely to be still here?"

"I have to return to Paris for a few days, but my work is far from being completed, and I shall be back in London on Friday, about seven in the evening. . . . Will you dine with me then?"

"No, I can't leave the hospital on a Friday. . . . But come here yourself, and perhaps. . . ."

He looked at me long and steadily, like an architect gauging with his eyes the strength of a beam or a wall.

"Of course," he said, "you'll stick to your promise not to breathe a word about what you've seen here. . . . It would mean the loss of my position and of the opportunity to continue my experiments. . . ."

I shook his hand, and left. I had great difficulty in finding my way back in the fog, and it was three o'clock in the morning before I got back to my hotel. I could not sleep.

I AM reaching the point in this story where circumstances led to my playing a larger part in it, and I must admit at once that, after my solemn promise given to James, I was blameworthy in talking to a French scientist, even indirectly, of his researches. But I had, I think, some excuse. In the first place, it was chance, and not my own intention, that during this period brought me into touch for the first time with Monestier. Further, as will be seen, the questions I asked him were such that he could not for a moment think that investigations of so strange a kind were really being carried out by a doctor. And finally, I am bound to say that the steps I took, rash though they may have been, enabled James to make great strides toward the solution of the problem.

I reached Paris on a Saturday, and dined that same evening with some friends. Taking my place at table, I found that I had Monestier as my neighbor. He had long been an object of my admiration, for he is not only, after Jean Perrin and Langevin, one of the greatest of physicists, but also a perfect writer. And I was charmed by the man himself, with his eyes as blue and lively as a child's, the soft clump of his white hair, and his swift, youthful voice. He talked first, I remember, about the works of Esnault-Pelterie and the possibility of a voyage to the moon.

"I shan't go, myself," he said. "My son will perhaps go. My grandson certainly. . . . In any case, there will be hundreds of volunteers."

"How will they breathe?" I asked.

"They will have oxygen with them," said Monestier. "And later, when a colony of human beings has been settled there, an oxygen market will be opened where the housewives will go every morning to get their supplies of breathable air. . . . The life will seem quite simple to those who live it. . . . What would Christopher Columbus have thought if the liner *Ile de France* had been described to him? Read your Jules Verne and Wells again. Almost all the dreams of the preceding generation have become the realities of today."

It was just then (and doubtless because he had sympathetically thrown the names of Jules Verne and Wells into the conversation) that a sudden and irresistible desire caught me to question him concerning the scientific value of Dr. James's investigations.

"I ought to tell you," I said to him, "that I am thinking of writing a fantastic story myself; and it is one on which, as I have the opportunity, I should be very glad to have a scientist's opinion. . . . Of course you'll think the subject quite absurd. . . . I know it is. But I'd like to know, supposing that a scientist was so foolish as to make certain experiments, what course he would take, what line of inquiry he would follow."

Whereupon I recounted to Monestier, as if it were a fictitious story, my conversations with James, and the experiments which I had witnessed. He listened with good-humored amusement.

"It is not really so very absurd," he commented. "Why shouldn't there be 'psychons' as there are electrons? We know so little, after all. . . . Then what exactly do you want me to tell you? What experiments your doctor could make? Well, in his place I should first try to find out whether certain rays do not make visible

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this energy which he thinks he has collected in his flask. . . . Have you ever seen how certain fluorescent substances, invisible in broad daylight, become visible in darkness under ultra-violet rays?"

"No, never."

"I can show you that some time; it's a very pretty sight. . . . Could you come to my laboratory tomorrow?"

"I should be delighted."

And the next day I found him in a new building, surrounded by shining and complicated apparatus. When I entered, he was standing before a glass tube in which, on coming nearer, I could see rings of woolly light, mauve-pink in color, pale and unearthly.

"Ah, good day!" he said. "Look, here is a very odd phenomenon. . . . Look at this. I pass a magnet right along the tube. . . ."

He was holding a small horseshoe of metal, and he shifted it slowly toward the right. Whereupon I saw the rings separate from each other, following the magnet and turning paler and more transparent. Then Monestier moved the magnet back toward the left; and the rings slipped into each other until they formed simply one small ring of a violet-colored substance.

"It is delightful!" I exclaimed. "But what is the explanation?"

"Ah!" he said, "that is what I'm looking for! I don't yet know. . . . But you came along to see the phenomena of fluorescence. I mustn't waste your time."

In one corner of the room stood an extended apparatus, completely black, looking rather like a large-scale camera, covered with the cloth which photographers use when they are focusing.

"This is the apparatus that produces ultra-violet rays," said Monestier. "Visible light is shut off as it emerges by a black disk which only lets the invisible rays come through. . . . Look—will you kindly switch off the light. . . . The switch is farther to the left. . . . Good. Now I set the apparatus in action in the dark. . . . You see nothing. . . . If you put your hand over the path of the beam you will see it turn partly luminous, and if you leave it too long, you'll burn yourself. . . . Good. Now I place in front of the apparatus a flask filled with water. Naturally, it is invisible. . . . But I pour a fluorescent substance into the water and—look!"

Suddenly two spots of steely blue appeared in the darkness, like planets hanging in the night. They spread out, curling in slow spirals, growing larger and fainter, nebulae becoming more and more attenuated. A liquid smoke filled the whole flask with an unreal, luminous cloud.

"How beautiful!" I said. "It is like being present at the creation of matter. . . . But why isn't all that visible in ordinary light?"

"My dear sir," said Monestier with a smile, "the 'becauses' of science are nearly always statements of observed fact. . . . You remember Molière's *'Quia est in eo virtus dormitiva'*. . . . Because there are fluorescent substances which are visible in ultra-violet rays. . . . But to revert to your story—and I dreamed a lot about it in the night—nothing prevents one from supposing that your 'vital fluid' is fluorescent. . . . The doctor in your tale could certainly borrow an apparatus in his hospital similar to this one. . . . Let him place one of his bell jars in the path of the rays and—who knows?—perhaps he will see the 'psychons' suddenly become luminous."

"Yes—a very good idea. . . . And do you think that the glass of the domes would not allow the energy which they contain to escape? Wouldn't he need metal ones? Or rock crystal?"

"Ah, that I don't know. . . . It all depends on the nature of your fluid, which is unknown to me. But I see no *a priori* reason why glass should be inadequate. . . . If it is, you can suppose that your hero tries a colloidal glass. Then you'll have beautiful red flasks in your story. . . . But I'll show you something else."

He showed me blades of soap, infinitely thin, in which there were formed disks of vivid, changing colors, and I did not venture to say more to him about "my story."

I RETURNED to London on the Friday evening. A bad crossing left me too tired to go out again the same night, and it was not until the Saturday morning that I went to see James at the hospital. He was not in his room, but the door was open and I went inside to wait for him.

The great curtain was pulled back. The shelves which this curtain had hidden on my first visit held a small pair of scales, an inverted glass bowl, a few small bottles. Whilst awaiting my friend's return, I looked at the women's photographs which stood along the mantelpiece and on the writing table, and I then saw (what I had not observed on the first day) that they were all portraits of the same woman, a girl, almost indeed a child. The expression of the face was gentle and ingenuous, with charming features, and hair so very fair

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as to seem almost white. In nearly all these portraits the young woman wore costumes of bygone times.

Was she an actress? Did she like to set off her beauty with different adornments? I was lost in that musing into which the enigma of a lovely face always plunges us, when I heard footsteps. I turned round. James was behind me. He laid a hand on my shoulder, and himself glanced at the portraits for a moment.

"Well!" he said at last in his hoarse voice. "You've got back, have you? And how did you find 'the Gay City'?"

"Very pleasant. . . . I don't know any city more charming than Paris in springtime. . . . But that's not the question. I believe, James, that I picked up some valuable suggestion over there for your researches."

"For my researches? How so?"

I told him of my indiscretion, making it plain that it could entail no dangers to himself. I described what I had seen in Monestier's laboratory, and gave him as clear an account as I could of what the scientist had told me.

"Do you understand, James? It seems to me that if you could pass a beam of ultra-violet rays above the body just when you think something escapes from it, you would perhaps be able to see the fluid become luminous. . . . Of course, it may just as well be the contrary—but couldn't you try? This hospital surely has an ultra-violet-ray apparatus?"

"Oh, yes," he said, musing. "The only difficulty would be to get it in the dissecting room. But that shouldn't be really impossible. . . . Yes, thanks very much—it's a good idea. . . . I have often seen experiments in fluorescence, but I hadn't thought of applying them here. In any case, I can make a test in my own room on one of the small animals. Will you come over tomorrow night? We'll do this together."

I promised to come, but I asked him, if he had to kill a rat or any other creature, to do so before my arrival, as I greatly disliked such a sight. He laughed at me a little, and told me that the animals would not suffer, as he anaesthetized them beforehand with an injection.

* * *

The state of excitement in which I found James next evening is past imagining. The sound of my step on the staircase brought him out of his room, and when I reached the landing he held out both hands to me.

"Look here, old man," he said in a low voice, "we've got a solution, thanks to you."

"What do you mean?"

"Come in and have a look."

The room was dark, but James guided me from behind with a hand on each of my shoulders.

"Be careful," he said. "The apparatus is in the middle of the room. . . . Keep a little to your left. . . . Farther. . . . Right. . . . Now straight in front of you. . . . Do you see anything?"

Over toward the fireplace I could discern a faint glow, about the size of a nut, but more elongated. Going closer, I saw that the interior of this luminous kernel contained darker currents revolving extremely slowly. The whole thing reminded one of the appearance of certain photographs of celestial nebulae.

"What have you got there?" I asked him. "It's curious, and rather beautiful in a way. . . ."

"I'll let you see it in the light," he said.

He moved away for a moment. The light in the middle of the room went on. I saw on the mantelpiece a small glass bell jar, beneath which lay a dead rat stretched on its side. The warm glow had vanished. I looked at James inquiringly.

"You look very surprised," he said. "But I have applied the idea you gave me. . . . What you saw just now was a small mass of—I dare not call it matter—let's say, if you like, of the luminous fluid which appeared under the beam of the ultra-violet rays at the top of the jar, twenty-one minutes after the animal's death."

I was overwhelmed, scarcely able to believe what I had just seen and heard.

"But this is extraordinary, James. . . . Nobody has ever thought of this. . . . It is a great discovery—don't you think so? And where is it now, your fluid? I don't see anything in the globe."

"Quite true. Nothing is visible in ordinary light, and that explains why neither I nor anybody else never noted the phenomenon before. . . . But your method, or that of your physicist friend, if you like, is the right one."

"I'd like to see it again."

He switched off the light and turned on the apparatus. Instantly the tiny elongated kernel shone out with its soft nebular gleam.

"Really, James, I'm beginning to think that you are on the path of a wonderful

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and unforeseeable future. Do you think that the personality of a rat—do you think that the individuality of this creature persists in some form allied to this little glow?"

"I know no more than you do, old man. . . . All I can say is that it seems to me possible, even probable . . . and also, that I've decided to repeat the experiment on a man as soon as I have a larger bell jar. . . . And further, note that this fluid, luckily for us, is lighter than air and collects at the top, a fact which makes it quite easy to preserve even if the bowl has to be lifted to withdraw the body."

We stood silent for a moment or two in the darkness, gazing at this light which was perhaps the manifestation of a mysterious presence. At last James turned on the light again.

"How surprising it is," I said, "that such important and simple facts should hitherto have eluded mankind!"

"Why?" said James. "Isn't it the history of all scientific phenomena? The data of all the great discoveries have existed in nature for thousands of years. What was lacking was a mind to interpret them. When the cave-dweller dropped a stone into the stream beside his rocks he could have discovered, as Galileo did later, the laws of the velocity of falling bodies. . . . He didn't think about it. . . . Ever since the earth has been the earth, thunderstorms have provided wonderful experiments which could have shown all mankind the existence of electricity. . . . They were explained by the wrath of Jove. . . . Men have always been surrounded, and the atmosphere has always been traversed, by the rays of which our modern physicists make use; yet these rays remained invisible and elusive, like the vital force of my rat."

"Poor beast! Take it away, James. . . . I hate seeing that corpse amongst the photographs of that lovely woman there. . . ."

And after a moment's hesitation, I added:

"Who is she?"

"Don't you know her?" said James. "That is Edith Philipps. The young actress, you know. . . . The whole of London is crowding to see her play Ophelia just now. . . . Haven't you been? I must take you one of these evenings."

"Take away the rat, James."

Carefully he raised the globe, and drawing the animal out by its long tail, he wrapped it up in a piece of paper.

"Now," he said, "we must see if our light is still there."

He repeated the experiment. The little ball of light was gleaming at the top of the jar.

CHAPTER III

MY VISITS to Saint Barnaby's Hospital became of almost daily occurrence. I continued my work at the British Museum because I was forced to, and because I could not spend the daytime with Dr. James, whose profession left him little freedom; but my friend's researches were of greater interest to me than my own. Every day I waited impatiently the hour he had appointed for me. In the reading room itself, instead of working, I kept watching my neighbors, a girl with tortoise-shell spectacles, a little Hindu with curly hair, and imagined them lying on Gregory's grim balance. And when the hour came round, I hastened over to the city of chimneys and wharves.

Twice a week, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, the thoroughfare leading to the hospital was occupied by the humble street market which I had noticed on the occasion of my first visit. I enjoyed stopping beside the open-air booths where they sold fish, and books at a penny apiece, and old boots. Sometimes I had a talk with the hawkers. One of them, Mr. William Slutter, was a favorite of mine, on account of his astonishing natural distinction and his handsome head, which was like that of an aged aristocrat. He sold for sixpence queer little cigarette-lighters on which a pig, with uplifted trotter, made the spark fly.

"Wonderful joke!" he kept calling. "They never let you down. . . . I was sold out yesterday. I've only a few left." As a matter of fact I never saw him sell a single one. But he kept his good-mannered smile and an air of confidence in life. Nothing was further from my thoughts when I was talking with him one Wednesday about the difficulties of his trade than that he would be the subject during the very next week of the most extraordinary of experiments.

Yet so it turned out. Mr. William Slutter contracted a virulent pleurisy and was brought to Saint Barnaby's in a state that left no hope. That same day one of the big stores which prided itself on being able to supply anything, delivered to Dr. James the bell jar large enough to cover a human body, as he had ordered three

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weeks before. That evening, when I accompanied James on his round of the wards, I was taken aback at finding William Slutter's usually peaceful features there, ablaze with fever. "Wonderful joke . . ." he kept calling. "Only a few left. . . ." And the next night, at midnight, I saw him again in the dissecting room.

I was beginning to be inured to this macabre spectacle. James, on the contrary, was in great agitation that night. He had helped Gregory to hide the gigantic globe beneath the rising tiers of seats, and was afraid lest the little man might break it as he lifted it with our help on to the table and set it over the corpse. The doctor had had to give up the idea of using the weighing machine, as it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to keep the globe balanced on the platform. On the other hand, he had again obtained the loan of the ultra-violet-ray apparatus. Gregory was not aware of the nature of our new researches; he no longer understood what the doctor was doing, and gave us only clumsy and ill-humored help.

At last poor William Slutter lay outstretched under the huge jar, and the contrivance was placed so that its top should come into the line of the rays. These manipulations took so long that we had only six minutes left until the moment when, according to the now familiar time-table of these experiments, "something" was sure to happen. James had his eye on the clock and told Gregory to put the lights out. I watched the invisible top of the globe, trying hard not to lose its position. The waiting seemed endless.

"One minute," said James.

I began to count slowly. One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . I had reached fifty when I saw a faint blue mist appearing. At first it seemed shapeless and as if diffused over the whole width of the beam. But this stage was so brief that I could not observe it. Immediately the vapor became condensed in a milky mass, about four inches long, the base of which was horizontal, with its rounded top following the curve of the globe. This mass was neither motionless nor homogeneous. Currents of lighter and darker color were visible in it. I cannot describe it better than by asking you to imagine the smoke of several cigarettes, of varying density and slightly different colors, superimposing their rings and spirals until they formed an object of well-defined outline.

"Doctor!" came the startled voice of Gregory. "Doctor! Doctor! Do you see that ball of light?"

"Keep quiet!" said James's grating voice.

I saw the doctor's head come into the field of the rays from the apparatus, and some of his features were for an instant lit up. Then he vanished into the darkness again. I could feel, though I could not see, that he was leaning, to watch it more closely, over the strange substance which he made his prisoner. I thought of William Slutter. . . . Did there really remain, under that glass bell, some fragment of what once had been that simple and contented soul? Was it possible that everything which had given life to that inanimate body was now concentrated in that tiny space? Were we holding there some impersonal force, or were we holding the individual William Slutter? Could he see us? Was he conscious of his incredible adventure? Was he thinking at that moment— "Wonderful joke . . ."? And if the least chance of his consciousness existed, had we any right to keep a soul captive?

"Lights, Gregory," said James's voice.

I was surprised to see again the doctor, the little assistant with his waxed mustache, the apparatus with its black cloth cover, and there, under that inverted bowl now deprived of its gleam, the corpse of an old man with a white mustache.

* * *

James looked at me with a nod of his head. I felt that he was himself overwhelmed by the success.

"You saw that ball of light, sir?" Gregory asked me.

"We all saw it," said James in an impatient tone. "What I now want, Gregory, is for you to keep this bell jar for me without breaking it, and especially *without turning it up*. . . . Do you understand?"

"Yes, Doctor," he replied humorously. "But don't give me another of these, for I shouldn't know where to stow it. As it is, if the students were to find it. . . ."

"I said nothing about another one," said James. "We'll give you a hand to carry this one underneath the seats."

And the three of us carried out this maneuver, not without difficulty; and then left Gregory. The little man seemed taciturn. When we were out in the hospital quadrangle under the starry sky, I said to James:

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"I think you ought to give him some explanation. . . . You need him. . . . Now this evening. . . ."

"You're wonderful, my boy! What do you expect me to tell him? He knows as much as you and I do. . . . Can you yourself explain what we have seen?"

I told him that I could do no such thing, but that the experiment seemed to confirm all the theories he had put forward to me on the evening of our first dinner. If his hope had been to catch and preserve something of human beings after their death, he was on the track of such a possibility. I further admitted that I did not see what this success was leading to, for even admitting that he had the soul of poor William Slutter under his globe, he could not enter into communication with it. And I added that I was doubtful regarding his right to keep this unknown substance in captivity.

"For after all, James, suppose that the law of human nature really is that a vital fluid escapes from our body after death, to merge with some universal reservoir of life, why and how should we stand in its way? Your globes are not eternal, and a day will come, when, despite you, William Slutter will cease to be William Slutter. And what will you then have done but vainly prolonged an existence, under conditions which perhaps are dreadful? You have made an amazing discovery, and one which will give you one kind of fame when you choose to make it public. . . . But you must confine the risk in these experiments to the bounds of strict necessity. 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio. . . .'"

"That reminds me," he said, "that I must take you to see 'Hamlet' one evening. . . . Good night!"

I COULD hardly have visited Saint Barnaby's Hospital so often without making the acquaintance of some of the medical staff. On several occasions James had taken me to a meal in the dining room of the resident members, where I had had some conversation with my neighbors, and I became particularly friendly with Dr. Digby, a mental specialist of the staff. I have always had a strong inclination, which I cannot explain very readily, toward the society of medical psychologists. . . . Experience of abnormal persons seems to give them a keener and more ingenious understanding of the normal. To myself, striving to be a writer and to understand mankind, their conversation always provided valuable lessons. Besides, I found Digby unusually congenial. He was a short bald man, with a look of wisdom in his eyes, who spoke in a very soft voice, with precision and intelligence.

On the day following the evening I have just described, I arrived in advance of the time fixed by James, and was strolling in the grounds of Saint Barnaby's, on the flowered terrace bordering the river, when I met Digby in a long white coat.

"Hullo," he said, "are you alone? Our friend isn't ill, is he? I didn't see him at lunch."

"I think he is all right, Dr. Digby, but he won't be free for a quarter of an hour."

He began to say something, stopped hesitantly, and then went on:

"Oh! Then this is just— No. . . . Yes. . . . As you have a quarter of an hour to spare, come into my room."

It was a very well-lit room, right on the terrace itself, and furnished with countless files and card-index cases.

"Cigarette? Whisky?" asked Digby. "No? Well now, listen. . . . As I've got the chance of seeing you alone for a moment, I'd like to talk to you about James. You're a friend of his; you're a stranger to the hospital; you can perhaps do us a great service."

"I should very much like to, if it is possible. But in what way?"

"I shall tell you. . . . But first of all it must be understood anything I say to you is confidential and cannot be repeated by you to any one, even to himself. . . . That's understood, isn't it?"

"Of course."

"Good. . . . Well, I have reason to think that you are in the know about certain mysterious experiments which James is said to be carrying on, to some quite incomprehensible end, and in which he makes use of the corpses of patients dying in this hospital. Am I right?"

"What an examination! I cannot answer, doctor. . . . And I must ask you not to take that reply either as an affirmative or a denial. . . . It merely indicates that I regard my friend's action as depending solely on his own conscience."

"I quite approve your attitude," said Digby with a smile. "But from my point of view I am convinced that I am doing my duty when I tell you that the hospital authorities have been startled. . . . So far, no inquiry has been ordered, mainly because everybody here is well disposed toward James, and also because the experiments as described seem absurd, though harmless."

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"It seems to me in fact," I said, "that if one can dissect a dead body, one can all the more—"

"Be careful!" he said. "You're going to say more than you wish. . . . Understand me. . . . If these rumors get round beyond medical men to those less tolerant persons, the board of management, our friend might well find himself in rather serious trouble. But that is my least important motive. I am chiefly afraid of— 'Oh!' you'll think, 'these specialists see their pet subject everywhere!' But never mind!— I am chiefly afraid that certain researches might prove a danger to James's mental welfare; and it is about his state of mind, if you will allow me, that I should like to have a word with you, because, I repeat, the circumstances seem to enable you to be of service to him yourself. . . . To begin with, do you know anything of his personal history?"

"What do you mean by his 'personal history'? I got to know him during the war. Of what may have happened to him before then, I know nothing. Nor indeed of his sentimental history since the war, for he is like all you English, not a man to talk much about these things."

"Well, I must tell you what I think it necessary for you to know. . . . In nineteen fourteen he married a Danish girl of great beauty, who was studying medicine in London. I knew her quite well. She was a woman of surprising intelligence; candid, too, and generous, but in no way suited to English life; but she had never loved James. On the other hand, he worshipped her, and I believe that she must have married him out of pity for the violence of the feeling she inspired in him. . . . When James went out to France at the end of nineteen fifteen, Hilda James felt herself completely stranded here and returned to her own country. There she met a young man more suited to her taste. She wrote to James telling him so, loyally but without trying to soften the blow. . . . She asked for her freedom. He rebelled, and refused. . . . One day, at the front, he learned that she had died in some obscure, dramatic circumstances, about which I know little. . . . He has never got over it."

"How mysterious people are, doctor! So when I was living in the same Flanders dugout with James, he had just gone through this drama—and I had never known it!"

"Yes. . . . That impotence of self-expression is at once the strength and the danger of our national character. . . . We keep ourselves to ourselves. . . . We 'repress,' as the layman now says with rather naïve pedantry. . . . It is not without dignity, but it is a dangerous thing for one's mental balance. . . . In James's case, which I have followed at pretty close quarters, I was genuinely alarmed during the first few years after the war ended. . . .

"He lived then in a solitude, a sentimental starvation, which a Frenchman like yourself, I suppose, could hardly imagine. . . . Had it not been for his work at the hospital, in which fortunately he was interested, I doubt whether his reason would have stood the strain. . . . Then, finally, when he was spending a holiday with his people in Wiltshire, he received an urgent call, in the absence of the local doctor, to see a young girl who was taken ill. She was an actress."

"Miss Edith Philipps?" I said.

"Ah! So he's spoken of Miss Philipps, has he?"

"No . . . at least, only just. . . . But I saw her photograph in James's room and asked who she was."

"So you know that she is very beautiful. But you haven't been in a position to observe, as I have, her close resemblance to the girl who was once James's wife. . . . That was certainly the reason why he became attached to her from the first day he set eyes on her, and with an intensity that has been constantly growing. . . .

"She is unmarried and lives with her father, Gerald Philipps, who was himself one of our leading actors. She would certainly be married were it not for her health, which is so frail that we medical men can hardly tell how she can possibly withstand the strain of her calling. . . . What does she think of our friend? Does she love him? Does she feel affection, or indifference, toward him? I have never seen them together, and all I know of them comes to me from third parties. I know only that he is desperately attached to her, that he spends all his free time with her, and that he knows her to be seriously ill and lives in terror of losing her. . . .

"That is what I wanted to tell you so as to help you a little in your relations with him. . . . I don't want to add any of the conclusions which I myself draw from these given facts, because you are too intimate with him, and I know from experience, alas, how dangerous it is to plant suggestions in a hypersensitive soil where they immediately become sources of infection. . . . Excuse my frankness!"

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"I am grateful to you, Dr. Digby. But I don't altogether understand. . . . What do you want me to do? I have no authority over James; I do not know Miss Philipps; and, besides, I shan't be staying much longer in England—even if I wanted to, I couldn't. When I leave, I shall probably lose sight of James."

"That is all quite true, and I am asking nothing definite of you. . . . I merely wished you to know the facts, so as not to find yourself walking blindfold on difficult ground. . . . Now it is for yourself to judge. . . . If you can bring our friend within a reasonable interval to forsake this dangerously heretical quest of his, I think you will have rendered him a service, and even a twofold service. . . . But go along and see him quickly, for I've kept you more than your quarter of an hour."

I left him. When I reached James's room, the buzzer was ringing its two-four, two-four summons. . . . James had been called down to a ward, and I had to wait for him. And I then observed that one amongst the photographs on the mantelpiece, the largest, was that of a different woman. I had noticed it the first time, because its resemblance to the other woman whose portraits surrounded it was truly astonishing.

I HAD not paid much heed to James's proposal, a few days earlier, to go and see "Hamlet." The days and nights I was then spending with him, amongst his patients and sharing in his researches, seemed to me as beautiful and as varied as the greatest dramas. But after my talk with Digby I was naturally fired with a desire to meet Edith Philipps, and I reminded James of his promise. He told me he would ask for seats on his first free evening.

On the way to the theater he explained that the company was that of a theater in a working-class district. The critics had been so enthusiastic in their praise of the young man who played Hamlet, and of an unknown actor's Polonius, and above all of the Ophelia of Miss Philipps, that a West End manager had provided a theater for the players. Whereupon the whole of London had been rushing to see them. Shakespeare became the fashion, and many people came out declaring that they had just seen "Hamlet" for the first time. This, said James, was certainly true of the majority, but England discovered "Hamlet" in this way every fifty years. His friend's father, Gerald Philipps, had himself made his name half a century ago in the title part, and had "revealed" this unknown author, William Shakespeare, to the English of 1875.

To myself, as to the spectators at whom James had smiled, "Hamlet" was a new play that evening. These actors had shown a simple, but all too rare, discretion in playing Shakespeare's text without cuts. The young man who took the part of the Prince of Denmark played with vigor and straightforwardness. When he spoke the lines—

"How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of the world . . ."

he seemed as closely akin to our French selves as the youthful Barrès or Benjamin Constant. It was the young man of all time. And so, too, with Miss Philipps. From her first entrance I could see that she was the young girl of all time. In her opening scene with Polonius, she displayed a blend of the demure, the artlessly forward, the childishly submissive, which I found enchanting.

"James," I said to him in the interval, "your friend is adorable!"

He seemed happy.

"You can tell her yourself shortly," he said. "I have told her that we would have supper together. . . . Are you pleased?"

"Delighted! It is excellent. . . . I've only one criticism—the Ghost. The Ghost disappointed me. Why make him speak from the wings? It is beneath the swords that Shakespeare's 'old mole' should cry his 'Swear! Swear!' Do you remember Goethe's comment on that point in 'Wilhelm Meister'? Goethe thinks that the Ghost ought to disappear underground, and that a tongue of flame should spring from the ground to show where he is."

"The odic flickering?" said James, glancing at me with the faintest of smiles. . . . "I wonder what the ghost of William Slutter is doing at the moment?"

"I wonder indeed! Is he still in the bell jar?"

"Yes, I saw him still there last night; the glass prison is keeping him for us faithfully."

"Don't you want to restore him to liberty, James?"

He laid a finger on his lips. In front of us stood an attendant offering ices and boxes of chocolates. The bell announced the end of the interval. We were plunged once more into the world of Shakespeare.

It will no doubt seem surprising to find

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me speaking in such detail of a performance of "Hamlet" in the middle of a narrative so different in its subject. But I have two sound reasons for that. First, this was the evening when I made the acquaintance of Miss Philipps, who, as you will see, plays an important part in the secret which I wish to reveal in these pages. And further, I know not why, the atmosphere of "Hamlet" remains linked for me with the memory of Dr. James. It was the only occasion on which I could gauge the depth of hidden, desperate feeling which lay beneath that tragic but impressive mask. At the moment in the players' scene, when Hamlet feels the shame of his own calmness in contrast with the actor's feigned emotion—

> **". . . all his visage wann'd,**
> **Tears in his eyes, distraction in 's aspect. . . .**
> **. . . What would he do,**
> **Had he the motive and the cue for passion**
> **That I have?"—**

I saw James lean forward and open his lips as if he were on the point of crying these lines aloud himself. During the scene of Ophelia's madness, for the first and only time in my experience of him, I saw a tear slip down his cheek. And there Edith Philipps, it must be said, was deeply moving. Her eyes looked forth upon a transparent world. Her voice came singing and speaking in a monotone, with infinite softness, and she held out invisible flowers. "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray, love, remember. . . ." She turned my thoughts also to so many things past and beautiful.

"Do you know," James said to me in the interval, "what is the most admirable thing in her playing? It is this—she succeeds in giving the impression, which mad-women in real life will often give, that madness is an almost conscious refuge. . . . Ophelia no longer wishes to see this horrible world; she has created another, the world of flowers, and her memories, and she will go on talking of it in her soft, implacable voice, to the very end. . . . Really, there is nothing in the theater more deeply human than that!"

When the stage had been strewn with corpses, and the young Fortinbras had had the Prince borne off upon the shoulders of four captains, and the audience had applauded loud and long, and the orchestra had played "God Save the King," we came out in silence.

"What a crowd of corpses!" I said at last.

"As in life," said James. "Will you come round the theater with me to meet Edith at the other door? She must be ready by now, for she has had time to change during the last act."

We found her ready, as he had said, and waiting for us with the stage-door keeper. She was a thoroughly simple young girl, ingenuously pleased by the few compliments I paid her, as if she had not already been told by every critic in London that she was an actress of genius. James took us to a little French restaurant. There, in the light, I could see Miss Philipps better. She was every bit as beautiful as her portraits, but startlingly pale. During supper she was very gay. I was a little disappointed by the quality of her remarks; but isn't one always disappointed in an actress whom one has just seen in a masterpiece? Unconsciously one has endowed her with the spirit of Shakespeare or Musset; one has wished, almost hoped, that she may prove in actual life to be Juliet, or Desdemona, or Camille. And one finds—a child. It calls for a gift of greater penetration than I then possessed to detect in her the poetry she really held. I can now see the traits in Edith Philipps that made her wonderfully Shakespearean. James himself had realized them long before. I was touched by the tender admiration he showed toward her. And we parted on coming out of the restaurant, as he wished to take her home to her father's before he returned to the hospital.

IF I HAVE succeeded in conveying any ideas of James's character you will have realized by now that when we met again, nothing further was said by either of us about Edith Philipps. I made several attempts to "start him off" on the subject, by taking up one of the photographs on the mantelpiece and looking at it with close attention. But I never succeeded. I regretted this, not only from curiosity, but because I believed (as I still believe) that my friend's unhappiness would have been lessened if he could have given utterance to the deep, bewildering passions which gripped him.

I had also tried several times, in accordance with my promise to Dr. Digby, to divert him from his researches. I pointed out to him that Gregory was now freeing himself from his influence, that the little man now only gave his help distrustfully and grudgingly, and that even the bank

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notes which James gave him more and more freely hardly brought forth a single word of thanks. The doctor likewise had observed these disturbing symptoms; but he did not make his visits to the dissecting room any less frequent. It must be admitted that his investigations had taken a very curious turn, and that I myself, though disapproving them, could not but follow them with intense interest.

In the first place, James had been struck with the difficulties involved in the handling and safeguarding of these huge glass bell jars, and had conceived the simple but ingenious notion of having them fitted at the top with a small globe, about four inches in diameter, communicating with the large one by a glass tube. Observing events under the ultra-violet rays, we saw, as might be expected, that the fluid rose from the larger vessel into the small one. The latter then became almost entirely luminous, the bell jar itself remaining dark. It was a simple matter to cut the connecting tube with a blow pipe and seal it, and so to preserve the "matter" or "energy" which was our concern, in a much reduced volume. By welding a new tube surmounted by a small globe to the same bell jar, the latter could continue to be used so long as it was not broken by careless handling.

These small globes, which could be easily carried about, had been preserved by the doctor in his own room. To avoid confusion he had gummed on each a small label showing the name of the person from whom the contents had been obtained, and the date of the event which everybody else would have called their "death," but which James called their "metamorphosis." Globe No. 1 was that of William Slutter; No. 2 was an old eelseller, Mrs. Prim; No. 3 was a Norwegian seaman. There were by now seven in all, set side by side on an empty shelf in James's room. I spent hours contemplating them. They looked like soap bubbles suddenly and miraculously solidified. Inside each there stretched shifting strands of mingling blue and green, which, one convex, the other concave, followed the curve of the ball. It was merely, I think, the reflected image of a window, sky and trees in the two surfaces of the sphere. But sometimes I fancied I could see other and stranger shapes quivering within.

"Ah!" the doctor would say, when he found me in contemplation before the shelf. "You're having a look at my 'souls,' are you?"

"How I wish you would set them free, James!"

"Later on," he would say. "When I've found out all I can learn from them."

From time to time he made an examination with the rays, to be sure that his "souls," or rather as he used to say his "fluid ghosts," had not escaped through the transparent walls of their prison. He observed no change. Every time he found that same milky gleam, the same stirring of whirling shapes. An incomprehensible, but real, life was maintaining itself inside the globes.

James had discovered that the fluid exerted a distinct action upon certain external objects. If one brought a screen of fluorescent substance close to one of the globes, it was faintly lit up. For a long time I hoped that it might thus prove possible to enter into communication with the "ghosts." The luminosity of the screens subjected to the action of the globes continually varied, and by long or short periods of light a conversation might have been possible. But all my efforts at interpreting these signs were in vain. James, for his part, tried to "bombard" the psychons, a first time with the help of X rays, and a second time by making use of radioactive elements. These last experiments, besides yielding no results, were distasteful to me. I regarded them as at once useless and cruel.

The word "cruel" may seem surprising —but what did we know of the effect of these atomic bombardments on a substance which might well be sentient? I had argued this matter quite frequently with James; and over the question of a much simpler experiment, yet one which seemed to me much more blameworthy, our arguments were resumed, but so fiercely this time that for a moment I almost thought they would put an end to our friendship.

I had been away for a couple of days, engaged in some library researches at Oxford. Visiting my friend on my return, I found him examining two globes added to his collection during my absence, bearing the numbers 8 and 9. No. 8, he told me, was Agatha Lind, a young dancer who had committed suicide with veronal; No. 9 a Russian, Dimitri Roskoff, who had died of cancer. I was surprised to observe that instead of cutting the tube, and so making the globes perfectly spherical, James had in each case left the tube on the globe, contenting himself with sealing the extremi-

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"Hullo, have you adopted a new method, James?" I asked. "I don't like it. . . . You rob our soap bubbles of all their beauty."

"You don't know what I want to do," he answered. "I have my reasons—you'll see. . . . I even think you will be pleased with me, you who are always complaining of possible cruelty in leaving a soul 'imprisoned in solitude.'"

"What do you mean?"

"It's quite simple. . . . Suppose that I place these two tubes in communication, one of the two globes being upside down above the other, what will happen?"

"I don't know. . . . Probably the two fluids will then mingle and fill the whole space."

"Just what seems likely to me, too. . . . But then you will no longer have one solitary soul; you will have two souls joined in a closer, more intimate way than is conceivable in any earthly union. . . . What's wrong? Don't you think that's so?"

"I don't know at all, James, but it seems to me a monstrous idea, and I cannot understand your conceiving it. . . . What! You would go and choose two beings at random who don't know each other, who would perhaps loathe each other, and you would force them, as you say, into a kind of union more intimate than any other, one that you yourself cannot even imagine? And you would do this for no reason, just for curiosity? No, not even from curiosity—because what will you ever know about the result of your attempt? Nothing—because, even granting that we are here in the presence of sentient and conscious beings, you are powerless to enter into communication with them!"

James looked at me solemnly, and even sadly.

"How unfair and passionate you are!" he said. "You know I am not a wicked man. . . . Very much the contrary. . . . I've had too many sorrows to be wicked. . . . I can understand other people condemning my researches, but you. . . . You ought to have realized long ago that I wouldn't occupy myself with these matters if I had not hopes of their possibly opening up great hopes, infinite vistas, for others. . . . Have faith in me. . . . I give you my word I will drop all research the moment I find what I am seeking."

"No, James, I implore you! Leave these things alone! Put them aside. . . . I'm going to tell you something that I ought not to tell you. . . . I assure you that if you don't abandon these dangerous paths of your own free will, you are going to be forced to abandon them. . . ."

"Oh? Have they been telling you something?" he asked eagerly. "All the more reason for getting ahead fast! I'm going to make this test immediately."

"I will have no hand in it," I said. "Good-by!"

And I came away. But as soon as I was out in the street, I regretted my words.

CHAPTER IV

NEXT morning I received a message at my hotel.

It was from James.

I tore it open eagerly and read:

Don't be obstinate. I was not quite myself. I have set free your protégés. Come over—you are the only man I can talk to about these things, and I need to talk about them. In any case, you are burning to know what has happened.

I jumped into a taxi, calling "Saint Barnaby's Hospital," to the driver. When I got there the hospital porter, who by now had become a friend, told me where I could find James; he had just been called over to one of the wards. I went up, and from afar I could see his face of anguish lighten at the sight of me. Coming over to me, he took me affectionately by the arm.

"Be easy in your mind," he said. "I have broken those two globes. . . . But I missed you badly; I'll tell you why later on."

He stepped behind the cretonne screen which had been placed round the bed of a woman patient for an examination, and I stood waiting. After a few minutes he reappeared, and led me on to the terrace.

"Well, James? Negative results?"

"Negative? Oh, no, not at all! Very curious results, but depressing."

"Depressing! You alarm me. . . . What happened?"

"Nothing serious. . . . But you remember how we both supposed that the fluid of the two globes would fill the whole of the available space? Well, that was a mistake! When I put the combined arrangement of the two sealed globes under the rays, only one, the upper one, was luminous."

"Really! But how do you explain that?"

"I don't explain, I never explain anything. I only state the facts. . . . The whole of the fluid in both globes, you see,

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had merged within the upper one. . . . Good. Well, now, tell me—do you suppose that this globe was a brighter or duller one than usual?"

"Brighter, of course, because it brought together—"

"Well, it wasn't! And that's what I find so depressing. . . . It was almost extinguished. . . . What is the deeper meaning of this phenomenon? What spiritual or sentimental reality can it point to? Perhaps we shall never know, either of us. . . . But faced with that wan, ashy light, those enfeebled and slowed-up currents, I thought of your scruples, and I saw more cogency in them than I did at first. . . .

"Even if there were only one chance in a million, I reflected, that two beings should be in misery through my own fault, yet that was ample reason for trying to save them. . . . You can imagine the strange and rather painful hour I went through. I kept repeating to myself the words of our friend Hamlet—'To die; to sleep; no more. . . .' I kept telling myself that after this hard life of ours, it is cruel to refuse men sleep and rest. . . . And at last I took a hammer, broke the tube, and turned the globe upward."

"And it emptied itself?

"Bravo, James! I'm delighted! And I'd be even more so if you promised to leave things there. It seems to me that, having reached this point in your researches, and given the degree of precision they have attained, you have only two courses open. Either you must make them public and repeat them in the presence of other scientists, or you must abandon them because you will be losing your position and your friends to no purpose. . . . As regards myself, I fear you will be losing me of necessity. My work is coming to an end, and I can't spend my life in England. In a fortnight I shall be leaving, and, believe me, I would leave with an easier mind if you gave me your word. . . ."

"Don't get sentimental, old man. A fortnight in France, and you will have forgotten me completely. . . . But you're right when you say that to continue repeating these experiments is useless, because nothing will persuade me to make them known. . . . I shall drop the whole thing. . . . Or at least, I'll only do one more . . . if circumstances ever make it possible. If that fails, the whole business will have been a dream, a dreary one, and no more. . . ."

"And you will give back Mr. Slutter his freedom?"

"You shall give it him yourself, this very evening."

And it was indeed myself who broke globe No. 1 that same evening. Before bringing myself to the point, I held it for a long time between my hands. In cracking it, would I be putting an end to the second, and brief, existence of Mr. William Slutter? There was no means of knowing, and it still seemed the lesser risk to allow nature to follow her accustomed course. I dropped the globe into an iron mortar, and with the noise of the splintering glass there was mingled, I fancied, a sort of infinitely distant vibration, infinitely faint, and yet perceptible.

* * *

When I saw Dr. Digby again I was able to assure him that James had abandoned the investigations which were disquieting the hospital authorities. Digby had already heard this from his informant, who was no doubt Gregory.

"I am pleased with this news," he said, "for we shouldn't have been able to shield him much longer."

I refrained from telling him that James had made a reservation in his promise for one eventuality. Yet I was almost certain that my friend, when he actually spoke those words, had a definite idea in his head, and, what is more, I thought I knew him well enough to have guessed at this idea. I had seen that the failure of that experiment in which he had tried to obtain the close commingling of two souls, or (as he would have said) two fluid "ghosts," had disappointed him profoundly, and that this disappointment was something far more than the disconcertment of a scientist whose hypothesis turns out to be unsound. It had long been noticeable that James's dominant emotion was an acutely painful sense of what the irremediable cleavage of death means for human beings.

He had often spoken to me of those words one longs to have said, words to remain forever unspoken save to a dead body, blind and deaf. The possibility of a more enduring union between two souls was bound to attract him and touch him in his most sensitive spot. And now, instead of the enhanced vital force which he believed and hoped that he would find by producing that union in the strange world of his "ghosts," he had been faced with the contrary—the quenching of the united pair. But his desire was left unvanquished.

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He had certainly told himself that the failure was due to the fact of the beings thus brought together having been made to repel each other, and not to commingle.

Furthermore, he thought that if two deeply united souls really could be combined, atom for atom, a superior state would then appear. Under his outward sarcasm, as I have already said, he was sentimental. He believed profoundly in friendship, and in love. The single experiment of which he spoke would depend, I was certain, upon whether chance ever brought him two people, in their last moments, whose unity in life had been perfect: he would try to unite them once more in death.

You will think that the chance of this happening was small. I myself was not so sure. Unless one has lived right inside the life of a great town, as is possible for the police-officer or the doctor to do, one has little idea of the sorrows and beauties it may hold. During the past two months I had been watching so many extraordinary cases pass through Saint Barnaby's that everything seemed possible. But my own stay in London was almost over, and I knew that if ever Dr. James carried out his last experiment, I should not be a witness of it.

During the fortnight I only saw him once again. I was working hard. I had found an old French friend, a secretary at the embassy, with whom I spent several evenings, and I did not return to Saint Barnaby's until the eve of my departure. I had telephoned to James asking if I could meet him, and he had sent word by the porter to come and see him in his own room about nine in the evening.

HE WAS not there when I entered, so I took a book and sat down in the armchair. After a time, as there was no sign of James, I drew aside the curtain concealing the "ghosts." I hoped that he had completed their liberation, and I had an idea, if he had not already done it, of asking leave to carry out the act of release myself before leaving.

The globes were in their usual place, and to my great surprise I saw that there was a new one amongst them, bearing on its label the number "10-11," without any name. I instantly realized that James had repeated the experiment of fusion which had angered me, and I felt seriously annoyed with him. . . . "10-11." . . . No name. . . . Who were these two hapless creatures? I was filled with a vague sense of anxiety which I had difficulty in defining more exactly. . . . Why wasn't James coming back? He had given me a definite rendezvous, and to be seriously late was not like him.

I was turning the mysterious ball over and over on my knees, when I felt two hands laid on my shoulder. "Alas, poor Yorick!" came a gay cheerful voice. I turned round, and was astonished by the change I saw in James's face. Never had I seen a human being so completely transformed within a few days. The lines of his face, usually restless and twitching, had taken a look of soothed serenity. His smile was no longer a sarcasm but a relaxation.

"What's happened to you, James?"

"Happened? To me? Nothing. . . . Why?"

"You look so happy. . . ."

"Oh! Is that so obvious, then? Well, the truth is that I am—and I'll show you why. . . . Just put that globe you have there on the mantelpiece, will you? How gloomily you were gazing at it! That's right. . . . Now help me to get my apparatus out from this corner. . . . Thanks. . . . Just a bit to the left. . . . Will you turn the lights out?"

I turned the switch, and a cry escaped me in spite of myself. A sphere of light was gleaming on the mantelpiece with prodigious radiance. It could hardly be compared with anything but that of a full moon in a perfectly clear summer sky, in Greece or the East. It was a gleaming pearl, and its depths moved currents more gleaming still, and a whirling nebula of liquid, flaming diamond.

"Marvelous!" I said. . . . "But what miracle—?"

For a few minutes longer he let me contemplate this amazing spectacle, and then, after putting on the lights in the room, he told me the story. It appeared that in a neighboring music hall, two acrobats, the Hanley Brothers, had been performing their flying trapeze act during the past fortnight. James had not seen their "turn," but Digby, who had seen it, described it to him, and later told me, too, about it. He had considered it as a spectacle of most uncommon quality and gracefulness. Ned and Fred Hanley were two very handsome young men, really brothers, whose resemblance was in itself a marvel. For their turn a backcloth of black velvet was dropped, and against this, during their terrifying spinning, their two white bodies stood out under the beams of the spotlight.

The brothers had enjoyed a great suc-

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cess, so great indeed that the management asked them to extend their engagement to another week. What happened on the first night of that extension? Nobody knew, and the police were making inquiries. Whatever the cause, one of the supporting wires of the trapezes had given, and the two brothers had fallen from a great height. Seriously injured, they were taken to the hospital and died there during the night, only a few minutes between them.

"Some of their friends came along with them," said James, "and I heard them talking about the extraordinary unison between these two lads, their work in common, and the strength of the affection that joined them; and I could not then withstand my desire to carry out in such favorable circumstances the final experiment I spoke about. . . . Don't worry—Gregory wasn't there. I had the help of a laboratory lad who understood nothing of what he was doing. . . . I came back to my room at three o'clock this morning; I united these two ghosts, and was able to contemplate the wonderful sight you have just been admiring yourself. . . . Do you now advise me to break that globe?"

"No, my dear James. I can only guess what is happening in it, but it would be surprising if such great beauty were not a sign of happiness."

And then, as the hour was getting late, I had to explain, notwithstanding my desire to stay, that I had come to say goodby.

"True," said James. "Well, then, goodby. . . . I don't know if I shall see you again. When life cuts apart it cuts deeply. But I shall always be grateful to you for these months during which you have been a loyal and discreet friend to me. . . . So loyal and discreet, indeed, that I am going to ask one last favor of you. . . . It won't be immediate—perhaps it will never arise. But it is possible that a day will come when I shall need your help. . . . Where I shall be, I know not, but I shall send you a telegram asking you to join me by the most rapid means, whatever your engagements at the moment. . . . You know me well enough to realize that I would not make such an extraordinary request if I did not have grave reason. . . . I give you my pledge to make only one such appeal to you in the course of your life, but for this single occasion I ask for your solemn oath."

"You have it," I said, moved by his deep earnestness.

"God bless you!" he answered.

He came with me to the door. It was a fine summer evening; but the moon in the starry sky shone with less brilliance than the light I had just seen on the mantelpiece, twofold and alive.

WHEN James said that I would forget him, I protested to the contrary. But he was not far wrong. During the next few years my work made heavy demands on me, and did not bring me back to England. Sometimes I thought about those strange weeks, but as one thinking of some fantastic tale rather than of a real memory. The first letter I had from James was early in 1926, to tell me that he had kept his promise and renounced the fuller pursuit of his researches; the second, in October, 1927, was to let me know that Miss Philipps had lost her father and that he was about to marry her.

This did not really astonish me. I sent them a small present, and in her letter of thanks, Edith Philipps, or rather Edith James, told me that she needed a few months' rest in the south of France, that her husband was taking a holiday to accompany her, and that they would both be coming through Paris the following week. Unfortunately, I was in the country when this letter arrived, and I did not see my friends when they were passing through.

In December I had a card from James. He and his wife were at Cap-Martin. He asked whether I would not come and pay them a visit, if I had any thought of traveling that winter, or if not, whether a telegram from him would still find me in Paris. I replied that, barring unforeseen events, I was anxious to remain at home and work.

About the middle of January, 1928, a friend of mine, a man of letters, fell ill and asked me to take his place for a lecture which he had engaged to give at Copenhagen. To oblige him, I accepted: and it may be that the memory of Hilda James, whose story I had not forgotten, counted for something in my desire to see something of Denmark.

My journey was only to take five days altogether.

I arrived in Copenhagen in the morning, and had to speak the same night. As soon as I got out of the train, one of my welcomers handed me a telegram which had just arrived for me. I opened it and read:

Come. James. Florida, Cap-Martin.

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I was bowled over. It had not occurred to me to let James know of my being away for such a brief time. But he had counted on my pledge, and my mind was made up to keep it, although circumstances would force me to do so more slowly than I could have wished. To the great surprise and annoyance of the organizers of the lecture, I told them my dearest friend was dying, and that I would have to set off home again. What time was the first train? There was none before the next morning.

I spent my day in scanning time-tables with the hotel porter. Even granted that there was no hitch, and that none of my trains on this long journey was late, I could not reach James until the third day. But his telegram, forwarded from Paris, was already twenty-four hours old; my friend would think me singularly careless. I inquired about the possibility of going by air, but the weather was bad and the winter service uncertain. All I could do was to send James a wire in my turn, explaining my delay and announcing my arrival. This I did. I lectured that evening, better than usual because of my high pitch of excitement. I did not sleep, and left Copenhagen in the morning.

During the long ensuing hours of Danish and German and French trains, ferry-boats, customs and passports, I tried vainly to foresee what I would find at my journey's end. I was filled with mournful and inevitable forebodings. The sole link of real intimacy between James and myself, and the one which made me, so far as he was concerned, irreplaceable, was that macabre quest of which I had been the witness. If he was urgently in need of seeing me, it could only be to help him in the course of an experiment of the same kind, and as his anxiety about it was such that he summoned me, it was not hard to guess what this experiment might be.

Would I get there in time? Wouldn't James and I have difficulties with the local authorities? I remembered with relief that M. Raibaldi, the préfet of Alpes-Maritimes, was a friend of my father's. He might be useful. Down came the train, past the olive trees, alongside the pebbly streams. Beyond Marseilles, the vivid blue of the sea and the white sails seemed cheerless and frightening. And at last, under a summer sun, about half-past two in the afternoon, as I was in despair of ever arriving, the train stopped in the station of Roquebrune-Cap-Martin.

James was not at the station. This hardly surprised me, for he could not have known which train I would arrive by, so I took a cab and drove to his villa. It was a small pavilion ringed with palm trees, in a garden full of flowers. I remember my pleasure at a whiff of heliotrope that reached me when I was ringing the bell. A servant clothed in black appeared on the steps of the house. "I seem to know this man," I thought as he came across the garden to open the gate for me. "Where the deuce have I seen him?" And just as he reached me, I recognized him. It was Biggs, an English soldier who had been the doctor's batman during the war, and whose services I myself had shared with James for several months.

"Good day, sir," he answered. "Yes, my wife and I were here, with Dr. and Mrs. James. . . . I am soorry to tell you, sir, that the doctor is dead. Did you not receive my second wire?"

"He was already dead, sir. . . . But come heard from him only four days ago."

"He was already dead, sir. . . . But come in."

He took my bag and carried it with him into the house. Then, seating me on a garden-chair, he told me his story:

"You know, sir, that Mrs. James has always been very ill. She had an operation shortly before her father's death. . . . When she became the doctor's wife, it was obvious to every one that she was dying, and of course to a medical man as he was, more obvious than to any one. . . . I always said, sir, that the doctor was a saint, and only married Miss Philipps to be better able to look after her. When he suggested that I should take service with them and come with them to France, I said to my wife, 'It won't be a lasting place, but we must take it. . . .' And we haven't regretted it, sir. . . . Nobody could have been nicer than the doctor and his wife. They were very fond of each other. . . . Never did I see people so easily happy. In the daytime, when the weather was good, they went and sat on the beach together, and in the evenings the doctor read aloud. . . .

"For the first couple of months, Mrs. James was pretty well. But after that, from the middle of December, she seemed only to get paler and more silent. . . . It was obviously the beginning of the end. But happily the doctor kept her hoping right to the last that he would pull her round. He told her he was going to give her a new treatment he had invented. . . . And in one room he prepared some very

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strange contrivances for this purpose. There was a big glass bell which could be raised and lowered by moving a small lever, small flasks, and an apparatus covered with a black cloth. . . . His 'laboratory,' the doctor called that room. . . . My wife and I never entered it. . . . What's more, he never used it himself, except—But I'm forgetting to tell you the most important thing, sir.

"Five days ago Mrs. James had a fainting fit and remained unconscious. My wife was with her, along with the doctor. About one o'clock in the morning he told my wife to go to bed, and that he would call her down if he needed her. He did not call her, and about eight next morning she came back into the room. . . . There she was startled to find that Mrs. James was no longer in her bed, and that the doctor had disappeared. On the table there was a large envelope addressed to me. . . . My wife was frightened and brought it to me in a hurry. I read the poor doctor's letter. . . . Here it is, sir. . . ."

BIGGS drew two letters from his pocket and handed me one. I read it:

Biggs—you are to do exactly what I am telling you, extraordinary as it may appear to you. Mrs. James died this morning, and I wish to avoid surviving her. Our two bodies are in the room I call my laboratory. Do not go in, and do not touch anything. Send off the telegram which you will find in the envelope; it is for the French officer who was with us at Ypres. He will come instantly and make all arrangements. So do not concern yourself with anything. Simply send off the telegram and wait. All will be well. Good-by.

"But then, Biggs. . . . " I began.

"Just a moment, sir. There was another letter, addressed to yourself, which I was to give you as soon as you arrived."

I felt a touch of reproach in his tone of voice. The letter he handed me was sealed. I tore it open and read as follows:

I fear I shall cause you pain, and probably serious trouble; but I have your promise, and know that you will do what I ask of you. Biggs will explain what has happened—I had foreseen it for a long time. You will then understand (although I dare say you had already done so), why during the time you were in London, I was so feverish in pushing forward the researches which seemed so wild to you.

In the house you are about to enter, you will find a laboratory very much like that in which we worked together at Saint Barnaby's. Under the glass bell jar in the center you will see two bodies—my wife's and my own. You remember the way in which the globe at the top of the jar is taken off. Do so with care. Then, after sealing up the globe, take it over in front of the black apparatus familiar to you. I hope that you will then have a glimpse of something of Edith and myself.

If you find, as I hope, and believe you will, our ghosts mingled in the same way as those of the two brothers, whom you doubtless remember, it is my wish that you should preserve them, and if possible that you should provide for their safe-keeping, by your children and your children's children.

Naturally, I cannot hope for the very long preservation of so fragile an object; but in my earthly existence I have had too brief an enjoyment of my poor Edith's love. If, thanks to you, I can find a few years' happiness in a world that is still outside our conception, I think you will have done a good deed. . . .

With that sentence I broke off reading, and eagerly asked Biggs:

"And where are the doctor and his wife now?"

"At the cemetery, sir. . . . After sending you the telegram I waited two days. . . . And then as there was no sign of you, my wife and I got frightened. . . . What could we say if we were asked why we had left these two dead people unburied? We're in foreign parts. . . . I only know a few words of French. . . . I went to the Mairie, sir, and showed them the doctor's letter—mine, not yours. A doctor came up and broke the glass."

"Broke the glass! Then everything's ruined, Biggs. . . . But why break it, when you told me it was easy to lift?"

"I don't know, sir. I didn't understand what he said. . . . I think that when he came in and saw these two bodies under a glass cover, he thought it was a case of asphyxiation. . . . Later on, after the post-mortem, he told me that the doctor had taken poison. . . . At least, I think that's how it was, sir—as I say, I didn't understand very well. . . . But what could the doctor expect, sir? And if you had arrived sooner. . . . After all, he was dead—what *could* we have done?"

Interrupting, I asked him to take me to the laboratory. I clung to a faint hope that perhaps by some miracle, the globe had remained intact at the top of the bell jar. Alas, I found the room strewn with broken glass. Of the jar and the globe there re-

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mained nothing but fragments. Those who had found the bodies had no doubt wanted to waste no time. They could hardly be blamed. How could they have guessed the strange nature of what they were wrecking?

"There is also this case, sir. The doctor had fixed a label on it saying that I was to give it to you. So I hid it in my own room when the men came."

"What's in the box, Biggs?"

"I don't know, sir."

I opened it. On a layer of crumpled paper I found a glass globe just like those of Saint Barnaby's, and I picked it up with sudden hope. Then I saw that it bore a label which I knew well: "10-11, Ned and Fred Hanley."

"Poor James!" I reflected. "So he succeeded in giving to others the survival he would so glady have had for himself!"

I went over to the cemetery to lay some flowers on the grave of Edith and Howard Bruce James, and left for Paris that same evening, carrying on my knees the case bequeathed to me by my friend. I clung to the object with a superstitious care which was the greater for my vague sense of remorse. Certainly, I knew not what form of existence James had desired for himself and his beloved, but I had given him my word to secure it for him; and now, in spite of myself but still through my failure, he was robbed of the fruit of his researches. Endlessly I wondered what I ought to have done.

It had not occurred to me that James would want to die at the same time as his wife. Was I to be solely responsible for that lack of comprehension? He alone knew his own designs, and could he not have anticipated more methodically all the opposing hazards in this unique event? Couldn't he have given Biggs exact instructions in the event of my not arriving? But doubtless he had thought that Biggs would grasp none of such recommendations.

For a long time I deliberately refrained from thinking about the experiments at Saint Barnaby's and their tragic climax. But for some months I have been feeling ill and quite near death myself. I have felt it my duty to leave an account of the incredible and true facts of which fortune made me the witness. It is my only means of providing for the safe-keeping, with all the care I have always taken myself, of the globe containing the mingled ghosts of Ned and Fred Hanley. Last night, possibly for the last time, I had a fancy to look at them in the invisible beam of the apparatus which was the doctor's legacy. Their brightness has not dimmed since the day when it made me cry out in admiration, up in James's room. The amazing persistence of so beautiful a phenomenon only heightens my grief at having been unable to unite, in that same way, Edith James and her husband.

The glass globe will be found in the small cabinet, shut off by a blue curtain behind a grille, on the right-hand side of my desk.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

BROOD of the WITCH-QUEEN

By Sax Rohmer

Spawn of absolute evil was he, master of all the arts of hell. . . . And pursue him they must through Egypt's secret crypts, to find the dread key to his power and shackle him—or be themselves destroyed!

Sax Rohmer is a favorite name in the rolls of Fantasy's great storytellers, and this novel is one of his best. . . . Don't miss the December issue when it comes to your newsstand October 27!

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NOR MOON BY NIGHT

Pride was his sin on Earth . . . would it deprive him of his one last chance at Paradise?

THE guard nodded to the tall prisoner beside him. "You're next to die, Stevens."

Stevens glared at him, scorn on his thin lips. "I know, and I'm not frightened. . . . Remember that."

"I wasn't trying to scare you, Stevens." The guard glanced sideways at the warden, and then was quiet. He hated Stevens, and yet it made him sick to see men go to their deaths. Stevens would be the sixth in less than ten minutes.

The warden nodded and the guard took Stevens by the arm. The prisoner shook him off, angrily, stepped forward alone. The guard looked questioningly at the warden, then shrugged.

The next guard opened the green door. Stevens hesitated for an instant, in the doorway, looking down at the six-foot drop to the floor of the small room.

Slick and shiny, it was, a perfect mirror, and Stevens knew well it was not an actual floor. This was the Matchen Screen. Five men, just before him, murderers like himself, had stepped off, fallen to that mirrorlike surface and vanished.

Perhaps it was better than hanging or electrocution, gas chamber or rifle fire. All states were using the Matchen Screen for carrying out the execution of the sentences of death. When something touched the surface of the screen it vanished—flashed into a nothingness that left no trace. Now it would take the life of Troy Stevens, as though he were but a common criminal.

He heard the low voice of the guard. "The others didn't have to be pushed, Stevens."

He cast a contemptuous glance over his shoulder, and stepped into space.

He felt himself falling toward the Matchen Screen, knew he would snap out of the sight of the witnesses—

Stevens landed hard, his bare feet sinking down into the soft ground. He realized his prison clothes were gone, that he was in the country, and that there were men around him. Lastly, he realized he was thinking. *Thinking.*

He looked at the five men and it was an instant before recognition came. Like himself without clothes, the five were grouped together, talking, wonderment in face and voice.

Bristen, the skinny little prisoner, saw him first. "Hi, Stevens!" His hand waved in hard-assumed nonchalance. "Welcome to Heaven."

The others turned, looked without speaking. Stevens regarded them for a moment, then turned to see his surroundings.

They were in a valley between tree covered hills. Those trees— They seemed to have been cut and trimmed to shape. The grass beneath his feet was short and soft and green, as though it might have been a lawn. Twenty yards away there was a small brook, winding through the valley, making approved gurgling noises.

Stevens looked at his former fellow-prisoners, then began to laugh. It was laughter that brought chilled glances from the others, for it was laughter utterly without humor, and was only the sound of his taunting contempt.

He stopped abruptly, looked again at Bristen, who watched with frightened little eyes.

"Heaven, is it? You're an ignorant fool, Bristen . . . and the rest of you. . . . Heaven? Do you actually think so?"

Two of the men muttered, but none spoke up to answer the question.

"Heaven after that stinking prison, yes!

"You must keep moving!" Hooper cried.

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By Peter Cartur

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But I'm afraid our scientific friends were off-base on the Matchen Screen. . . . It doesn't kill."

Jerome, heavy and slow-voiced, who had kidnaped once too often, spoke. "I guess we don't understand, Mr. Stevens."

Stevens nodded in appreciation. "Matchen invented his screen by accident. Then found anything that touched it vanished. He and the other fools assumed that the screen caused the disintegration of matter. That it destroyed whoever touched it. It doesn't."

"Then what *does* it do, Mr. Stevens?"

"Look around you. Is this Earth?"

"We were thinking it wasn't. More like heaven, if you're not wanting fleecy clouds and golden streets."

"Not Earth and not Heaven. . . . Apparently the Matchen Screen is a dimension door."

"I know what that is!" Bristen's voice was high, excited. "It's a way to get to another dimension. Like— Like—"

Johnson, heavy-set and awkward, turned to Bristen, his face showing relief. "What is it, kid?"

Bristen tried to go on, then stopped and pointed to Stevens. "He can tell you. I don't know the right words. . . . But I know what it is."

Stevens let the smile that stayed away from his eyes touch his thin lips. "Another dimension is really a term to popularize a mathematical thought. It would be simplest to explain by saying we're in another kind of space than that which Earth is in."

Johnson rubbed his forehead. "You mean like we're way off, maybe on Venus or Mars?"

"No. We're probably closer than they are to Earth— If we could figure some absolute measurements to use. . . . We're probably *touching* the Earth. Standing now, perhaps, in the basement of the prison. The walls are around us. . . . We might be standing in a wall—"

He saw the men shifting uneasily, and broke off. "It doesn't matter what we call it."

"Sure don't," Bristen agreed. "As long as it comes out like this, I'm happy."

Ignorant, Stevens thought. Ignorant fools who'd murdered and got out of paying the penalty because Matchen had discovered a screen.

For himself— He couldn't find a point of comparison. It wasn't ignorance, nor lack of planning that caused his conviction. A silly accident, a one-in-a-million chance had put him among these men—

He broke away from the thought and considered the situation. This was much like Earth, but greener and better. It was almost as though this were part of some great park. He looked at the sun, so familiar— Perhaps Sol himself as seen in another dimension. It was still early morning and the sun had not been long in the sky.

He realized the men were talking, beginning to drift up-valley.

"Wait! Come back!" he called.

They hesitated, started to return. Stevens had been careful not to move from the spot where he had landed. He reached down and started pulling grass out by the roots. The other men reached him, stood silent, watching.

"What's that for, Mr. Stevens?"

"So we can find the place where we dropped in. . . . See if you can find some stones, Jerome."

Jerome shuffled off in the direction of the brook, returned with two handfuls of smooth white pebbles. He dropped them where the grass had been pulled.

"Why are we doing this, Mr. Stevens?"

"So we can get back. We might not want to stay here the rest of our lives."

Jerome considered this carefully. "If we could get back to Earth from here, wouldn't it take us back in the prison?"

"Of course."

"Then, how—"

"We all owe something to that prison, Jerome. Don't we? . . . If we get strong, gather weapons, we can go back through for a surprise trip. Free some of the other prisoners, perhaps. Stage a raid on the countryside for things we need. Then we'll drop back through the screen. We'd have what we'd need to live here as we'll want to."

Jerome nodded. "I guess we might be wanting to do that some day. Just now, me and the boys want to drift up the valley a ways."

"No," Stevens said. "We've got to stay together. For strength."

"We're sticking together," Johnson remarked. "Except you. We want to go up-valley. . . . Some of the trees look like they got ripe fruit, so we'll make out."

Stevens tried to keep the anger from his face. "Think it over, man. We're going to need strength. Four more men are to be executed in the next week. We'll have them. . . . Then we can hunt for others."

Johnson remained stubborn. "I want to get along."

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"Are you fellows going to take this? . . . Let us be shoved off in this world with nothing? Nothing? Not even clothes?"

"Say, how about our clothes?"

"Never mind. . . . I imagine they were lost in the screen. Perhaps it only transmits living matter."

Jerome was thinking. "You might have something, Mr. Stevens. Wilson will be coming through. I like Will. Maybe we can have that raid. We'll need some stuff—"

There were assenting murmurs. Stevens sensed his victory.

"It won't work." Bristen's voice was shrill. "He knows it won't work. We get the stuff, then *try* to bring it back! Remember what happened to our clothes."

"That's right, Mr. Stevens. Guess it wouldn't do much good hanging around. Will probably'll be along after us."

Stevens fought to keep his voice calm. Surely he could handle these— This scum! "Doesn't what they did to you mean anything? They tried to kill us! . . . We could capture guards, bring them here, and—"

Johnson broke in. "No. No, I reckon we had it coming. They were just doing their job. . . . Coming, fellows?"

The five men turned, as one, and walked from Stevens. Fifty yards away, they stopped, looked back. Seeing he hadn't moved, they went on.

STEVENS watched until they were out of sight, hidden by the trees. He wanted to follow. But, if they weren't willing to accept his leadership— Certainly he wouldn't let them consider him an equal. Besides, if he waited here, more men would be coming through. He'd have time to think things over. He'd be ready with a good story for them.

He looked to the sky and saw the sun was heading high, yet there was no increase in the heat. It was pleasant, almost cool. He picked the fruit of a tree and found it good to eat, unlike any fruit he'd ever known. This, certainly, was not Earth.

Perhaps this world was inhabited by a race of its own development. *There* would be an opportunity!

At the very least there would be hundreds—perhaps thousands—of murderers who had been executed since the invention of the Matchen Screen. All those would be possible subjects of a man strong enough to forge an empire here. A man who could surely find a way back to Earth, and have this handy as sanctuary. Most here would be men—An empire would be needing women. As would an emperor.

The sun showed late afternoon. Stevens waited.

The sun was low in the sky when he rose from his place beside the brook to watch the man coming up-valley. He was naked, as they all had been. He walked fast, perhaps hunting for companionship.

Stevens wondered what prison he was from, idly watched him hurry along. The man saw him, changed his course slightly to take him to where Stevens waited.

As he drew closer, Stevens saw the man was thin, not strong-looking, and— Well, it would take all kinds, and a little more strength was better than none.

The man waved his hand to Stevens, smiled. He walked swiftly, for all of his apparent lack of strength, and his long legs covered ground rapidly.

He stopped by Stevens.

"Hi, Mister. . . . My name's Hooper. . . . Going my way?"

"I'm waiting for some—others. Stay awhile, and you can go with us."

Hooper shook his head. "Couldn't do that. Have to keep moving."

"A little while?" Stevens suggested.

"Can't do it, Mister. . . . Part of the morning's gone already.

"Morning!" Stevens looked at the low sun. "It's almost night."

Hooper looked up. "Nope, not for me. It's not high noon, yet. . . . Where did you come in?"

"Here."

Hooper's face showed alarm. "Here? You haven't traveled? It's a full day's journey, you know."

"From where to where?"

"From wherever you come in to the top of the valley. . . . Just one day."

"We can make it tomorrow." He could put it off again, tomorrow.

Hooper shook his head. "There's no delaying. Whenever you get here, it's morning. It's late morning for me, and almost evening for you. . . . "You can't make it, Mister." Pity showed in his face.

"Make it?"

"To the Gate. . . . Not before *your* night comes. . . . You've lost your chance."

"What chance?"

"To live again."

"Wait!" Stevens noticed his own shadow was long, Hooper's was very short. "What prison were you in?"

Hooper turned for the last time. "Prison? . . . I was killed by a truck."

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(Continued from page 10)

Chapters in New York City, Pittsburgh and Cleveland, and there are also a couple more coming up in Detroit, Washington, D.C. and several other cities which we hope will catch on.

Our intention is to bring about a national brotherhood of fans from all over, and by these means will there start a regeneration amongst STFans and its readers that has never occurred before. In turn, part of the services which the A.S.F.S. offers to its members are: A Low-Rate SF Book Service, wherein any member can purchase STFantasy books at 25% discount; Special Swapping and Pen-Pals activities and privileges and a Fanzine and Manuscript Dept., of which latter service handles any stories and articles which are submitted by members for publication.

Any readers interested in joining may simply drop a line for further information, and if a three cent stamp is handy, it would be appreciated if one were sent although not necessary.

STFantasy Forever,
Rev. Calvin Thos. Beck, Pres.
American Science-Fantasy Society.

P. O. Box 877,
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New York 17, N. Y.

A Toast to F.F.M.

You may as well have printed only one story, "The Outsider" by H. P. Lovecraft, in your June issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. A perfect example of Lovecraft at his best, the perfection of good wine could be compared to this tale. I need not mention his works, for you will know his creations, and it is heart warming to learn this story is the herald of many more of his cohorts to follow. Give these young tadpoles of fantasy a taste of the master's macabre style. Let the wild wind, running flame, and cold water loose to stir the young passion with the four horsemen—H. P. Lovecraft, Edgar Allan Poe, A. Merritt, and H. R. Haggard. I offer a toast to the best publication in its field, "All Hail! *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* does stand unequalled in its Day."

Fantastically,
R. L. Ward.

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Penn.

"Exceptionally Good"

First of all, let me congratulate you on a swell magazine—I've never read better. F.N. and F.F.M. are the two greatest fantasy mags on the market, and now you have another—*A. Merritt's Fantasy*. I have but one real complaint. They're not published monthly. This is one of the greatest sins a thriving magazine can commit—not to publish it often enough. I look forward in anticipation to your next publication containing "The Time Machine" by H. G. Wells. It sounds like it will be very good—you have a 1000 batting average with me. In the June issue—"The Adventure of Wyndham Smith" was exceptionally good. It held me to my chair all the way through it. It may have been a trifle hard to start, but most novels are.

I thank you for the fact that it was long. Please don't print anything but long ones unless the short ones are exceptionally good. And please, give me more Finlay covers. Saunders and Lawrence are good too, but I want to see a Finlay. "Mrs. Amworth" was a good story, but Lovecraft just doesn't appeal to me at all.

I want to beg, borrow or buy a number of back issues of F.N. or F.F.M. from some Fantasy fans. I've just begun reading Fantasy and I haven't read any of the more famous classics yet, or any of the better stories. Any fan having the "Polaris" stories—the "Palos" Trilogy—the "Skylark" series—or the "Golden Atom" stories, please write me. I would also be interested in other stories recently in F.N. or F.F.M. Any and all letters will be answered promptly with all my thanks. Please don't fail to write me, even if you don't have any magazines to sell. Well, I guess that that is about all I have to say except keep up the good work and publish your mag monthly if you can.

Always a fan,
Bill Calkins.

c/o C. A. A.,
Pangwitch, Utah.

F.F.M. Best in Fantasy

I have just finished the June issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, and, as usual, am firmly convinced that F.F.M. is head and shoulders above every other fantastic magazine.

"The Adventure of Wyndham Smith" was excellent. The story was original, well-plotted, and thoroughly interesting from beginning to end.

I have long considered "Mrs. Amworth" to be the best vampire yarn ever written, outside of "Dracula," and rereading it in your magazine certainly did not alter my opinion.

"The Outsider" was by far the best story in the issue, even though it had competition that was more than stiff. I've read it several times before, but that ending never fails to give me a chill.

Even though Bok can certainly do better than he did this issue, all the illustrations, including the cover, were superb. The best illo was the one for "The Outsider"—Lawrence (more covers by him please) has surpassed Leydenfrost.

I'm glad to see that you have changed your policy of reprints. There are hundreds of stories which have appeared in magazines which are indisputably unequalled classics.

Along these lines, I would like to see some stories by the late Robert E. Howard in F.F.M. Recently, another magazine has been reprinting some of his tales, but they are not representative of his very best work. He had a mastery of description and a general story-telling ability that, in my opinion, has never been equalled by any other writer of fantasy—not even Merritt or Burroughs or England.

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Speaking of England, let's have some more of his yarns in the near future.

I agree with Mr. Saunders about a permanent poetry section. Now, with your new policy, you can publish many more poems by Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, and Robert E. Howard.

I'm glad to see "The Cats of Ulthar" coming up. I've always wanted to read the "Time Machine," so three cheers to you for publishing it!

Brian McNaughton.

198 Bergen Pl.,
Red Bank, N. J.

Correction

In the August issue of F.F.M. you published my letter, but you gave another address than mine and you misspelled my name. I realize that the fault is mine, and it all happened because I did not type my letter and someone misread my handwriting. The name is Joe Neugroschel—address 565 W. 139 St., New York 31, N. Y.

New Fanzine

We are herewith announcing our new Fanzine, *Challenge*, a magazine of science-fiction and fantasy poetry published in answer to a long-voiced demand from hundreds of poets and poetry lovers in this field for a publication in which to express themselves. The editors through many years of poetry editing, criticism and reviewing will strive to give their readers only the most finished poetry of this kind, realizing of course, that in entering a pioneer field of poetic expression it will take time and training to find and present the best poets with the peculiar qualities of imagination with which to express the implications of the atomic age. *Challenge* is a quarterly mimeographed magazine whose editor is Lilith Lorraine, associates, Stanton A. Coblentz and Evelyn Thorne. $1.00 per year, 30c a copy.

Lilith Lorraine.

Rogers,
Arkansas.

Complimenting Our Printers

Since this is my first letter to the editor of a magazine, and since in all probability it will be my last, I would like to see it published in F.F.M. This is because F.F.M. is, in my opinion, the better fantasy magazine. Why? Because it has better artists, better stories, a better letter department, better proofreaders, and last but not least and most important of all, better linotype operators. These last mentioned, proofreaders and linotype operators, are responsible for the virtual nonexistence of typographical errors in all your magazines.

What prompted the writing of this letter is the fact that I have an overabundance of fantasy and science-fiction magazines on hand. I have read them, enjoyed them, and no longer have any use for them. Therefore I wish to dispose of them. They are for sale or for swap. I plan to charge 35 cents for back issues of F.F.M.

Now when it comes to swapping there are any number of things that I could use or would like. Among them are: Finlay Portfolios, Series One, Two, and Three; Lawrence Portfolios, Series One and Two; "Jumbee And Other Uncanny Tales" by H. S. Whitehead; "Marginalia" by H. P. Lovecraft; "The Werewolf of Paris" by Guy Endore (1933 Edition); *Amazing Stories* Volume 19, Numbers 1 and 2, Vol. 22 Number 12. There are many other books that I could use if I could swap for them.

The magazines that I have are, with the exception of six, in excellent condition. They are: F.F.M. '46 Feb., June, Aug., Dec., '47 Feb.-Oct., Dec., '48 Feb., June-Dec., '49 Feb.-Aug.; F.N. Mar. '48 through Sept. '49, May '50; *Astounding* Sept. '44-July '46, '50 Jan., Feb.; *Weird Tales* Mar. '47-Nov. '49; *Amazing* '42 July, '47 June-Aug., '49 June, July, Sept.; *Fantastic Adventures* '47 Jan., Mar., July, Nov., Dec.; '48 Jan., Mar.-Nov., '49 Jan.-May, July, Sept.; *Thrilling Wonder* '43 Fall, '46 Sum., Fall, Dec., '47 Feb.-Dec., '48 Feb.-Dec., '49 Feb.-Aug.; *Startling* '45 Spr., Fall, Win., '46 Sum., Fall, '47 Jan.-Nov., '48 Jan.-Nov., '49 Jan.-Sept.; *Planet* '40 Fall, '41 Spr., '43 May, Win., '45 Fall, Win., '46 Spr., Fall, Win., '47 Spr.-Win., '48 Spr.-Win., '49 Spr.-Fall.

Anyone who is interested in Yoga, Occultism, Archeology, or the Shaver Mystery, and who would be interested in discussing these subjects or trading books on them, would he please write to me? Please send stamped, self-addressed envelope for information on prices.

Dan MacGilvray.

144 Fort Road,
South Portland, Maine.

Back in the Fold

There are three years separating these words from the last of those strident letters which you so courteously and so regularly entered in your columns under my authorship. I mention this here because I have no doubt been forgotten by both yourself and the readers of your magazine, and the thought appalls me, since, though I had followed and praised your group for many years, I was not on hand to applaud your greatest strides of progress taken during these last three years and the time of my truancy. I refer not to an increased standard of quality in the material which you publish, for that quality has ever been present from F.F.M.'s beginning eleven years ago, but to the fact that that quality now prevails in the quantity of four magazines. Please assume then, that this note is generally both apology and applause—generally because specifically I offer a little criticism.

I had hoped that Kuttner's usual facility and good sense would organize and subdue Miss Moore's unwieldy, though I must concede, often interesting verbosity and emotionalism into a unique piece of writing. Unfortunately their collaboration produced no more than a cliché among plots, the castaways ensnared by island politics and the juvenile lead by the island maiden. The many excesses which the authors

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injected, a giant energy entity, giant purple and blue machinery, a giant head floating disembodied between illusionary walls of running water, and a giant suspended castle which preceded to "tinkle" rather than crash to the "pool of the floor", may, at the very least, claim the title of oddity, but no matter how wonder provoking, they seemed pale ornaments when strung over the stock plot and stock characterization. Because the lengthier Munsey fantasies are almost exclusively devoted to this redundancy, I find greater pleasure in F.F.M.'s pages whose policy of reprinting novels originally printed between hard covers affords a variety beyond the editorial bounds of this magazine.

I am pleased at the very virile letter section and the healthy flow of interest from the British Isles. The editor's column is informative and welcome again after its absence these last six or seven years. Mr. Moskowitz's book reviews were admirably comprehensive if a trifle late in reaching most readers of fantasy.

Mr. Moskowitz writes on page 106, "If you fancy yourself as an ultra-sophisticate who must find social significance in . . . stories and cannot tolerate lines . . . not clipped in the Hemingway fashion (then) this tale . . . will prove utterly insufferable to you."

The illusion to Hemingway is as absurd here in its usage as the title of the book to which he refers is immaterial to my argument. In effect Mr. Moskowitz seems to be saying that "ultra-sophistication" is a major prerequisite if one is to grasp the social significance of a work —that this grasping is a form of "ultra-sophistication", and therefore, by the term "ultra-sophistication", a stamp of intellectual snobbery.

I am in strong disagreement with this contention. Neither the insight nor the ingestion of the raw material upon which insight feeds is the result of "ultra-sophistication". Is it not true that the normally functioning intellect, with unconscious ease will, at least in part, grasp and extract the philosophical as well as the sociological significance of any honest literary effort, which, existing as such, must contain some thoughtful measure? And further, will not that same intellect encourage the process of extraction within himself simply because of the enjoyment he receives from that process rather than for the dubious pleasures of snobbery?

If one gives an affirmative answer to these two questions, which are for my part rhetorical, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that Mr. Moskowitz, in his statement, belittles the prerogatives of the normally functioning intellect and, in consequence, denies the intellectual capacities of his readers.

I have for sale a complete set of F.F.M. running from the first issue to the February 1949 number, the first four issues of F.N., and an assortment of other rarities which might interest the reader.

Thank you.

R. I. Martini.

310 W. 66th St.,
Kansas City 5,
Missouri.

Lovecraft Story First

Well, the second issue of the new order shows some improvement over the last number. All the stories and illustrations in this one were good. Listing the stories in order of preference, Lovecraft's masterpiece naturally comes first. "The Outsider" is one of HPL's greatest tales and deserves the recognition it gets. Bok's picture is unique, but I don't think it captured the spirit of the story (a very difficult thing to do—I wonder if even Finlay The Great could have done it?)

Second is E. F. Benson's "Mrs. Amworth," a tale fully as immortal as the—mythical?—vampires themselves. Such a calm and peaceful beginning, leading up to the grim climaxes; for there really were two in the story. The Finlay illo, I'll not hesitate to say, is the best that has adorned a page of any of your company's magazines for quite some months.

"The Adventure of Wyndham Smith" brings up the rear in the June issue. After the first few pages it lagged and didn't pick up until Chapter VIII. However, it was still a good story —and a brilliant satire to boot.

But what is this? Are you sure all of the illos for the novel are by Lawrence? Three distinct styles are displayed, only two of which I recognize as belonging to Lawrence. Something new has been added—and I like it.

The more I see of Saunders' work, the more I like it, but don't ever believe that it can equal that of Finlay or Stevens.

Seeing that the requests for Arthur Stringer's fantasy, "The Woman Who Couldn't Die," have done some good, I'll start crusading for another novel, Captain H. E. Raabe's "Krakatoa, Hand of the Gods." Combining rip-roaring action on the sea with the quaint beauty of Polynesian legends and a strange love story, it is one of the best fantasies I've found outside the works of Merritt and Howard.

If Lovecraft is now on your list of available authors for FFM, is it conceivable that you could print some of Robert E. Howard's wonderful stories? His two Conan novels, "The Hour of the Dragon" and "Red Nails," would be appreciated by a great many of your readers, I'm sure.

I can hope, can't I? Farewell until the next time.

Robert E. Briney.

561 West Western Ave.,
Muskegon, Mich.

F.F.M. and F.N. List

Was glad to see that Popular Publications printed Jack Mann's "The Ninth Life." I reread it and enjoyed it immensely. I would like to suggest a few superb tales which I think would go over big with your readers. They are Frank Aubrey's "Devil Tree of El Dorado" and his "Queen of Atlantis." They are both terrific lost race tales, a bit archaic in spots, but this is covered over by their all-around excellence. The second mentioned is practically unobtainable, as is his "King of the Dead."

I have just finished making out a complete

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listing of all F.F.M.s and F.N.s with their lead novels and authors. I will be glad to send this list to interested fans and collectors.

Claude Held.

372 Dodge St.,
Buffalo 8, N. Y.

WIREZ News

S. Fowler Wright has turned out many stories that have received great acclaim. Thanks to your June issue of F.F.M. I have now read all but one—"Deluge." I hope you can remedy this for me in some future issue.

The story of Mrs. Amsworth was good, overlooking one discrepancy—she specified that she be buried next to the soil—yet the men had with them a screwdriver with which to open the coffin. . . .

"The Outsider" was by far the best piece of horror you have published in some time—almost as good as Bradbury, but surpassed by Richard Matheson's first published bit, "Born of Man and Woman." I don't believe in "old masters" or "the good old days." Those are myths substantiated by weak memories. There is no writer of olden days who is not equalled if not, indeed, far surpassed by many of our present day authors.

With the exception of the cover by Saunders, the illustrations were well up to par. Why didn't you have a few Van Dongens? He's been doing quite well for himself. And, since so many of the readers seem to be demanding it (and I heartily agree!), why not a cover by Bok? That,alone, would make the magazine worth buying!

In the interests of science-fantasy, why not urge your readers to drop a few letters to the networks putting out s-f programs and thank them for making them available?

Now, a favor: Some little time ago you obliged me by printing a letter asking for new members for my wirez-spondence club, WIREZ. I'd like to issue another plea. The first time I gained something like five new members. Perhaps a repeat will do as well. . . . Briefly, the club is composed of wirecorder owners who wirezspond (as differentiated from *correspond*) with each other. Also, there is a wirecorded magazine, *Wirez*, that is right now in circulation. And, along that same line, still another favor: *Joseph Baker: Where are you?* Anyone knowing the present whereabouts of Señor Baker (a lost member) or anyone wanting to find out more about WIREZ, please write,

Shelby Vick.

Box 493,
Lynn Haven,
Florida.

A New Index

I would like to make an invitation to all readers of your magazines in the Bay Area. Here in San Francisco there is a fan club, The

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Golden Gate Furturian Society. We meet every other Friday at the house of the club librarian, Agnes Rundle. We hold informal business meetings and after each meeting we have a gab fest. We talk on all the aspects of fantasy. So I would like to invite all fantasy and science fiction fans in the bay area who have not come to any of the meetings to do so. Also if any fans come to San Francisco for a vacation to get in touch with me. The club librarian's address is 419 Frederick St., S. F.

I am also announcing a service for fans. It will prove helpful to all fans. It's *Index Incorporated*. Each month I will send out an index, by author-title-contents page, to magazines (pro-fan-slick). Each index will be checked by an advisory board of ten known fans. They will check each index for mistakes, pen names, and artists. I am also sending a copy of my index to the editors of their magazines. This will make the index doubly correct. I would like all the persons who are interested in *Index Incorporated* to write to me and I'll send them more information on this service.

Claude D. Plum, Jr.
526 Ellis St.,
San Francisco 9, Calif.

Tri-State STFantasy Club

I would like to announce the formation of a new organization, the Tri-State STFantasy Club, in this area, Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri. All STF fans are asked to get in touch with the Secretary, Don Myers, at 1507 So. 7th St., Keokuk, Iowa.

Edwin Rogers,
Vice President.
319 F St.,
Keokuk, Iowa.

Short Stories Wonderful

Naturally the first thing I saw of the June issue of F.F.M. was the cover. "Gad," I exclaimed, "how did *that* thing get on F.F.M.?" Then I knew; it's this new guy, Saunders again. A few of his covers have been pretty good (though he can't compare with Lawrence, Finlay, and (sigh) Bok), but in this cover you find none of the subtle beauty which is normally associated with the covers of F.N., F.F.M., and A.M.F. The girl, instead of being sweet and clean looking, is brazen. And the bem—such things belong on some of the science-fiction mags, but not on F.F.M. Then, too, it is too crowded. 'Tis just a conglomeration of eye-searing color. Why not something, like Lawrence's beautiful one for "Morning Star" more often? Your three fantasy mags are famous for their beautiful covers—keep them that way!

S. Fowler Wright's "The Adventure of Wyndam Smith" was boring up till about the last twenty-five pages, then it took up and maintained the usual degree of action found in F.F.M. I don't like blood-and-thunder, but I do want stories that *move*.

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

The shorts, though, were wonderful. 'Twas not till I finished "The Outsider" that I realized everybody's praise of Lovecraft is really well founded. I had read "Mrs. Amworth" before, but enjoyed it anyway. Thanks for two of the best shorts you've featured since I've been reading *Famous Fantastic Mysteries.*

Tom Covington.

315 Dawson St.,
Wilmington, N. C.

New Club

Instead of raving about "The Adventure of Wyndham Smith" (a wonderful story!), I'd like to talk about a new club which is being formed in New York. We have made arrangements for a room to meet in, and for guest speakers, and have quite a few plans for it. Prominent NYfan George Raybin is Acting Chairman; other officers have not yet been selected. We intend to have a fanzine, hold regional conventions, and do many other things of interest to science-fiction and fantasy fans.

Those interested should contact me for details.

Morton D. Paley.

1455 Townsend Ave.,
New York 52, N. Y.

Wright Highly Entertaining

This is my first letter to your magazine or any other, and since I am a new fan, I would like any other fans who have back issues for sale of F.F.M. and F.N. to help a new fan get started.

I will appreciate any and all replies to this request.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the editors of F.F.M. for publishing a fine magazine.

I have always been interested in fantastic literature, but could never find a mag that covered what I liked in fantastic reading. F.F.M. and F.N. do.

Your novel for the June issue, "The Adventure of Wyndham Smith," by Wright, was highly entertaining.

J. E. Van Horn.

2601 Calhoun,
Gary, Indiana.

Liked Wright's Story

I was glad to see S. Fowler Wright back in F.F.M. This, it seemed to me, was your best offering since "The Purple Sapphire." Not one of Wright's strongest stories, being a little too dragged out as British Stf is apparently wont to be, it was nevertheless a great improvement on the run-of-the-mill lost-race stories you have run so frequently in the last couple of years.

I was also much pleased to see the announcement that you will run some stories which have previously appeared in magazine form. The

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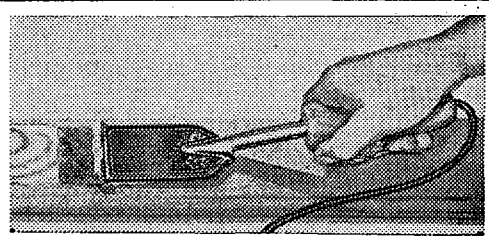

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Lovecraft material sounds especially good. Other authors I would like to see are Wandrei, C. A. Smith, and R. E. Howard. Long's "Hounds of Tindalos" would also go pretty well. Glad to see Moore and Kuttner coming up in F.N.

Seymour Sargent.
R.F.D. 10,
Penacook,
New Hampshire.

Lovecraft Welcome

A few comments on the June '50 issue. Although "The Adventure of Wyndham Smith" was a welcome title, I didn't enjoy it. For some reason I just don't like Mr. Wright's stories and I have read his "Deluge" and "Dawn" also. Didn't even like his "The Island of Captain Sparrow" in the April '46 issue. Others will enjoy the story and no one can please everyone all the time. Lovecraft's somber little tale was welcome indeed. Last time we saw a Lovecraft story in F.F.M. was "The Colour Out of Space" in the Oct. '41 issue. Time really does fly, doesn't it? It is to be hoped that the readers will see more of his stories in the near future.

Preview of the next issue. Both "Donovan's Brain" and "The Time Machine" are excellent stories that I have read before and I will be happy to see again. Don't overdo Wells—he is fairly common. Some of his works are not easily obtainable and would be good items for F.F.M. Some of Edgar Rice Burroughs' works like "Moon Maid," "Beyond Thirty," "Monster Men" would be nice to honor the memory of this Master of Fantasy. Most of the Tarzan and Mars books are available at a buck each and would not be useable for F.F.M. There is just too much scarcer material that should be printed.

Might I again suggest some titles which have been asked for again and again, lo these many years: "Ayesha," "Gold Tooth," "The House on the Borderland," "Kaspa the Lion Man," "Last and First Men," "Last Man in London," "Green Fire," "Starmaker."

Have a few *Amazings* and *Wonders* '29-35 for sale or trade. Just send a post card. I want to obtain selected issues of *Fantasy Commentator* Nos. 1-16.

Edward Wood.
31 N. Aberdeen St.,
Chicago 7, Ill.

Comparing Great Fantasies

In a great many of the letters which are printed in science-fiction and fantasy magazines I see mention of stylings which are attributed to certain authors, and of how one particular style of writer appeals more to one fan than another, and I am led to wonder if that fan has ever bothered to actually make a comparison of styles of one writer to another. The plot, I believe, has a great deal to do with the eventual completed styling, and it is the plot

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mainly which determines whether a writer is good or not, in the estimation of the reader.

In other words, depending upon how swiftly or slowly a plot moves, the writer might be inclined to neglect a style which made him famous or at least admired; the object of this neglect being to present his story as carefully as possible so that it not only will be read but also accepted by the reader as a piece of fiction worthy of notice. One author's description of a scene might be written in the same style as that of another writer, if the trend of his plot includes a train of similar circumstances that are present in that other author's story, and it would not have to be written with the same self-expression which that author uses.

It has been told me, and I agree, that Poe never expressed himself in his stories, there is evident instead an abundance of prose. Because of this fact and the kind of stories he wrote his works are considered classic, and it is with the same esteem that I regard them. To illustrate my point I had intended to compare Wells' works (what I have read of them) with three authors whose books, one of each, I have just read, but I believe it would be more simple to compare Wells with Poe. Readers of these two authors might agree with me on what I next have to say.

The thing which made Wells such a great writer was that he enjoyed making manifest the power of words; then he would quickly inject an air of mystery, explain everything quite satisfactorily; tell the whole story in one or two paragraphs—possibly more—then conclude, leaving an impression that he wished he could have given the reader more, but that was it, all of it. Another thing Wells did was to finish his stories plausibly; never making his characters do anything which was contrary to their nature. Poe's styling of his stories was directly opposite to Wells. Poe contrived to show that words could be used successfully no matter how they were used. He even made a joke of words by coining one of his own—"tintinabulation"—probably endeavoring to show how all the words in his stories were mere extravaganzas compared to the ultimately inexplicable phenomenon of absolute incomprehensibility. The air of mystery he included in his works is not too vividly apparent. It is injected ever so slowly; description and narration are masterfully intermingled so that the reader finally realizes that there is a mystery. Upon finishing the story the reader wonders if he has indeed finished it for it still seems to be narrating itself over and over in his mind. Poe left the reader with a not-too-polite impression that he (the reader) had now read the story and could read it over again, for all he cared, to find out what had transpired. He left the reader with the final impression that there was more, definitely more, but who was he to try to explain it. So expertly did he analyze his characters, their actions and the workings of their minds, that it was never quite clear what had happened to them and they seemed to be motivated by a force of which he had no knowledge.

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Summing it up, Wells was earthly in his conjectures and Poe was most certainly unearthly. Poe left the culmination of his stories in a suggested, unknown force, and Wells left his to things more material.

I have always enjoyed reading stories by these authors. They wrote with a style difficult to master. To the best of my knowledge I have read all of Edgar Allan Poe's works, but I still have a long way to go before I read everything Wells wrote.

I am looking forward to reading again "The Time Machine" in the August issue of Famous Fantastic Mysteries; one of Wells' better tales, I think, and one of my favorites.

Eugene Louis Calewaert.
3138 East Congress,
Detroit 7, Michigan.

Wants Leinster List

I have just finished the June issue featuring "The Adventure of Wyndham Smith" and can say it's the best we've had in quite a while. More like it, please. I also liked "The Secret People," and, to a lesser degree, "Morning Star"—all three are better than average.

Undoubtedly, many of F.F.M.'s readers have heard the Saturday night fantasy and science-fiction stories on NBC's "Dimension X," which has presented several good programs. I would like to obtain in printed form two of them, "Green Splotches" (Stribling 1920) and "The Outer Limit," author unknown. Anyone having either for sale, please write.

A bouquet of roses to the editor for deciding to use previously printed tales in our fine mag. It should bring us many fine classics otherwise unavailable.

My collection of F.F.M. is almost complete at last. I still need "Allan and the Ice-Gods." Anyone got an extra for sale in good to excellent condition?

I would like to read the sequel to "The Lion's Way" which appeared last year. I'd also like to see soon "Slayer of Souls" and "To the Ends of the Earth."

Yours for more great stories,
William Berry.
18 Sandusky Lane,
Alabama City, Ala.

P. S.—I'd like to obtain a list of all titles by Murray Leinster. Who's got one?

Bon Voyage, Roy!

Yoo hoo, here I am again. I know you've been in a fret wondering when my next letter was coming. Worry no longer, here it is!

The recent death of the great Edgar Rice Burroughs was a sad blow to fantasy.

I would like very much to be able to offer some old mags for sale or trade, but a harrowing incident occurred a few days ago. My kid brother, an avid cub scout, was cleaning out the attic. He spied a pile of my old fantasy mags all covered with dust. And being a good

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little scout he turned them into a paper drive his den was having.

The readers' column in the June ish. was interesting but unfortunately there was no epistle from Roy Hale. Now there is a remarkable fellow.

The letter from South Africa gave me quite a kick. Maybe we should change our name to "The Crapshooters' Digest."

Don Hutchison says all the screen versions of Haggard's novels have stunk. I disagree. In 1937 a British company made an excellent version of "King Solomon's Mines."

This will be my last letter to you for some time. I'll be working all summer on a freighter going to South America and won't have time to write. Ever since my stretch in the Navy I haven't been able to stay away from the sea.

So until we meet again I wish you and your sister magazines smooth sailing.

Roy Hale.

St. Paul, Minn.

Wonderful Finlay

Though I've been a F.F.M. fan for years, and enjoy the Readers' Viewpoint too, I've never, so far, written my comments.

But say! Virgil Finlay's frightening illustration on page 107 has had the effect of breaking my long silence.

That picture sold a magazine for you, believe it or not.

Looking at the magazines at the stand and trying to decide which one to get, I suddenly came upon this dark, eerie-looking scene with its weird, winged subject staring at me. My mouth practically fell open and I gazed in incredulous fascination. What could it be? Woman or devil? I glanced at the title of the story, "Mrs. Amworth," and looked again at the drawing. I had to know what it was all about.

I bought the magazine just for that gooseflesh illustration.

Finlay is a wonderful artist. His pictures make you look and look again. Some of them are very beautiful, but none of them made me turn back the pages while reading, as I did in this issue, just to take another fearful look at the dark, evil figure of Mrs. Amworth.

I was glad to see a Lovecraft short. I've read "The Outsider" a good many times and it's a wonderful yarn. A gem, really. How about some of his shorts that haven't been published in books, such as "The Temple" and "The White Ship"?

I wish the other artists would sign their names to their drawings the same as Finlay does. Thus I would know which is which. I know Lawrence and Bok made the other illustrations. Whichever one made the drawing for "The Outsider" certainly did a good job.

Well, thank you for the years of good entertainment I have had through your wonderful magazine.

Violet F. Nelson.

Rt. 1, Box 65,
Willows, Calif.

Editor's Note: Bok illustrated "The Outsider."

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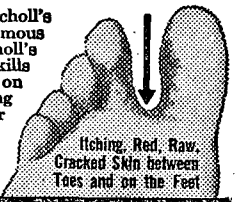

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WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT

HAIR LOSS

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There are six principal types of hair loss, or *alopecia*, as it is known in medical terms:

1. Alopecia from diseases of the scalp
2. Alopecia from other diseases or from an improper functioning of the body
3. Alopecia of the aged (senile baldness)
4. Alopecia areata (loss of hair in patches)
5. Alopecia of the young (premature baldness)
6. Alopecia at birth (congenital baldness)

Senile, premature and congenital alopecia cannot be helped by anything now known to modern science. Alopecia from improper functioning of the body requires the advice and treatment of your family physician.

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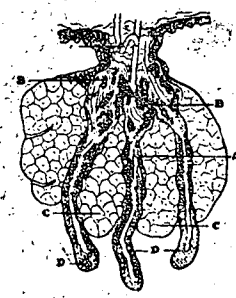
2. ***OILY SEBORRHEA:*** The hair and scalp are oily and greasy. The hair is slightly sticky to the touch and has a tendency to mat together. Dandruff takes the form of head scales. Scalp is usually itchy. Hair loss is severe with baldness as the end result.

Many doctors agree that to NEGLECT these symptoms of DRY and OILY SEBORRHEA is to INVITE BALDNESS.



DESTRUCTION OF HAIR FOLLICLES
Caused By Seborrhea
A — Dead hairs; B — Hair-destroying bacteria; C — Hypertrophied sebaceous glands; D — Atrophic follicles.

Seborrhea is believed to be caused by three germ organisms — staphylococcus albus, pityrosporum ovale, and acnes bacillus.

These germs attack the sebaceous gland causing an abnormal working of this fat gland. The hair follicle, completely surrounded by the enlarged diseased sebaceous gland, then begins to atrophy. The hair produced becomes smaller and smaller until the hair follicle dies. Baldness is the inevitable result. (See illustration.)

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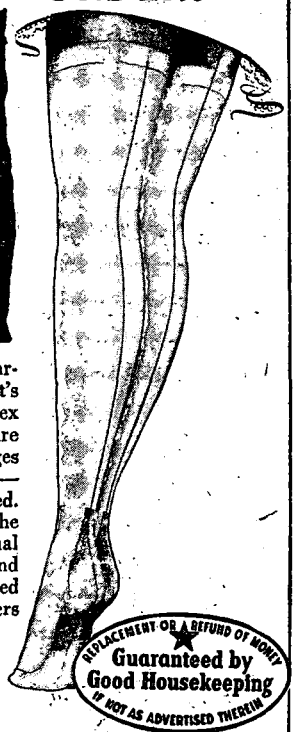

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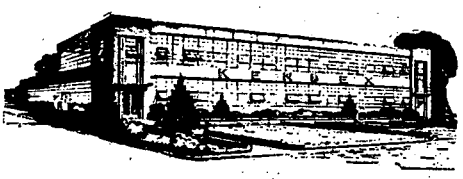

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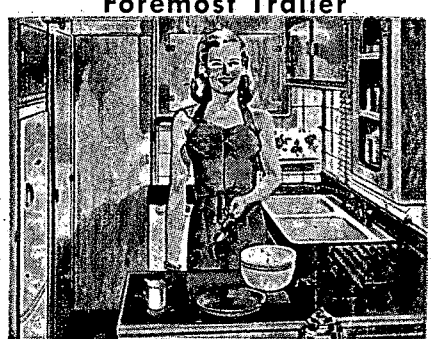

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